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*American Book Company*

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## *PREFACE*

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**T**his history is designed to present a dynamic approach to the study of ancient and medieval philosophy. It correlates ancient, medieval, and modern ideas and shows the perennial significance of the contributions of ancient thinkers.

To some extent this work is a re-evaluation of ancient philosophy. Thus, more space than is usual is devoted to the Skeptics and Philo, who have been very much underrated by earlier historians of philosophy. Philosophy, like many other fields, is often dominated by convention and tradition. Hence many historians have followed blindly in the footsteps of Gomperz, Zeller, Burnet, and Robin, who all had a tendency to underestimate the contributions of post-Aristotelian philosophy.

Throughout this work an attempt is made to indicate the relationship between ideas and the social environment out of which they arose, for it is a mistake to believe that ideas develop in a vacuum or in a process of spontaneous inspiration. Frequently the student is completely bewildered by the complexity of medieval thinkers and is unable to appreciate their contributions. But with an understanding of the atmosphere and the environment in which medieval thought was formulated, especially in religion and in education, he may obtain a more adequate appreciation of the philosophy of the Middle Ages. Therefore, particularly in the case of medieval

philosophy, the cultural factors which produced Scholasticism are discussed at length.

Thanks and appreciation are extended to the many persons who helped in the preparation of this volume: to Miss Marjorie Reitz, Mr. Irvin Edell, Mr. Robert Tandy, and Miss Nancy Beaver for their clerical assistance; and, especially, to Dr. Henry Dittmar, Dr. Richard Eckels, Dr. Alvin Haag, Dr. Lawrence Nelson, and Dr. Ralph Tyler Flewelling for their kind advice and encouragement.

*Frederick Mayer*

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*A HISTORY OF  
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## THE GREEK SPIRIT

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### THE FOUNDATIONS

**T**o understand the development of ancient philosophy, it is necessary to comprehend the Greek view of life with its intellectual and secular emphasis. Compared with the medieval view of reality, Greek civilization lacked a supernatural bias and, instead, concentrated upon the facts of this world. Most apparent is the intellectual tolerance which prevailed in Greece. There was no sacred dogma, no absolute standard of belief or of religion. The priesthood as yet had not achieved an all-powerful status.

At the same time there were limitations to this tolerant attitude. The fate of Socrates, the persecution of Anaxagoras, the varied fortunes of Euripides, the experiences of Aristotle—all these instances illustrate that tolerance was limited, especially in times of social chaos and external danger. Still, Greek thinkers were aided in their researches by a general absence of dogmatism and fanaticism.

It is difficult for us to understand the Greek spirit, because in our civilization the machine is triumphant and has been developed to a point where it threatens to turn into Frankenstein's monster. In

Greece, on the other hand, the use of machinery was limited. The ideal of life was a sufficient amount of leisure for man to cultivate his independence from mechanical tools. To some extent, the Greek view was rather parasitical. It abhorred utilitarian concepts, and hence many Greek philosophers were content to speculate about the nature of the universe without applying their theories to the concrete facts of existence and without the use of scientific experimentation.

Perhaps no period in civilization has ever been so rich in speculative boldness and penetrating cosmic insight as the great period of Greek philosophy. It appears that the Greeks were naturally curious and inquisitive about the nature of life and the structure of the universe; consequently philosophers like Democritus, Aristotle, and Plato observed all aspects of existence and were occupied with problems which not merely dealt with ethical ideals but also gave a synthesis of human knowledge.

To appreciate the greatness of the Greek spirit we must compare it with the Oriental view of life. In the Orient, especially in India, a rigorous caste system prevailed, whereby the individual was subordinated to the social group. There was a lack of fluidity. Intellectually, Indian thought as compared with Greek philosophy was static. The regression of the social system in India naturally brought about a stress upon mysticism and developed a spirit of escapism. In Greece, on the other hand, the naturalistic attitude prevailed, symbolized by a democratic social system and a better adjustment of the individual to society.

### THE GREEK VIEW OF RELIGION

What distinguished Greek civilization, both from its Oriental environment and from our modern concepts, was its frank *polytheism*. Almost in every way the Greek gods were different from the God of the Old Testament. Jehovah appeared as a fierce god of righteousness, who demanded absolute obedience and, jealous of his prerogatives, punished his people whenever they rebelled against him and paid homage to other deities. The Greek gods, on the other hand, were almost delightfully immoral. They committed acts of perjury, fought ferocious wars, and frequently showed interest in adultery. They represented the humanistic spirit of Greek civilization.

It must be understood that the Greek gods were exceedingly *corporeal*. To be sure, a few philosophers, such as Aristotle, spoke

about a spiritual deity, but this was not a general viewpoint. To the average Greek the gods appeared as magnified human beings who understood human wishes and human desires and were in active relationship with man. Religion in Greece had, above all, a social function. Various city-states had their special patrons; for instance, Athena watched over the fortunes of Athens. The religious festivals were occasions of public celebration, and religion influenced almost all aspects of Greek life, especially art, warfare, and politics.

There is danger of idealizing Greek religion and overemphasizing its positive aspects. The Greeks, like other early peoples, were given to divination, and their practitioners of magic had a wide and appreciative audience. We need only read the plays of Aristophanes, especially *The birds*, to obtain a vivid glimpse of the importance of divination in Athenian life. The Oracle at Delphi was frequently consulted and regarded with awe as the source of absolute truth. Military expeditions were influenced by astrology, and many philosophers were accused of impiety because they protested against the growth of superstition.

Thus in Greece, as in other civilizations, a chasm developed between the religion of the average man and that of the educated thinker. The average man had a rather naive concept of the universe and, governed by fear, believed in miraculous events and was subject to a multitude of prejudices. The philosopher, however, had a more sophisticated outlook. While he might not directly attack the public deities, he frequently tried to explain them in an allegorical manner and occasionally achieved an attitude of complete skepticism. This view was especially dominant in the 5th century B.C., during the height of Athenian civilization.

In Greece there was much less inwardness and subjectivity in religious life than there is in modern civilization. The relationship between man and the gods was rather mechanical. If the gods received their due and were respected, man could achieve prosperity. Frequently there was little connection between theology and moral action. Certain rites had to be performed, and certain rituals had to be obeyed, but what happened in the heart of the worshiper was a secondary matter.

Many commentators have pointed to the lack of a sense of moral alienation in Greek life. Thus, in many ways the Greeks were happier than we are. They knew nothing of "original sin." They were not tortured by complexes, nor did they look upon the pleasures of the flesh from an ascetic viewpoint. This attitude produced a

feeling of well-being. Life was to be enjoyed to the utmost, for it was not regarded as a pilgrimage amidst a valley of tears and torture. Still, voices of pessimism emerged; for example, Theognis remarked, "It is best never to be born and never to see the rise of the burning sun." Like Job, he was tormented by the problem of evil, by the fact that the wicked triumph and the virtuous are defeated:

"Dear Zeus, I wonder at you. For you are king of all; honor and great power are in your hand; you know well the mind and temper of every man, and your lordship is supreme over all, O king.

"How is it then, son of Cronos, that your spirit can endure to keep the sinner and the righteous man in the same state, whether the heart be turned to soberness of life or to the insolence of men that are tempted to unrighteous works?

"Heaven has drawn no clear line for men, not even which way a man must go to please the Immortals.

"Bad men none the less enjoy prosperity, and they who refrain their spirit from foul deeds are overtaken, in their love of righteousness, by poverty that breeds helplessness and turns aside man's heart to sin, blinding his wits with overmastering necessity."<sup>1</sup>

Sophocles expressed the same spirit: "Never to be born is, past all reckoning, best; next best, by far, when a man has come into the world, that, as soon as may be, he should return thither whence he came. For when the days of his youth are gone, and the foolish delights thereof are fled away, the stroke of affliction smites him and spares not; he is weary and has no rest from envy and strife, friction and warfare, and the shedding of blood."<sup>2</sup>

Again, he wondered why the impious are rewarded: "Strange, that impious men, sprung from wicked parents, should prosper, while good men of generous breed should be unfortunate! It is not right that heaven should deal so with men. The gods should manifestly reward the pious, and the unrighteous should suffer some manifest punishment for their wickedness. Then the wicked man would not flourish."<sup>3</sup>

Sophocles hoped that ultimately virtue would triumph. Nevertheless, the questions he asked regarding the problem of evil indicate the tormenting doubts which dominated Greek life. It is a mistake to picture the Greeks as being extremely poised and well-balanced. This is a one-sided view which neglects the pitfalls and

<sup>1</sup> Theognis, *Elegies*, 373.

<sup>2</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1225.

<sup>3</sup> Sophocles, *Aletes*, frag. 107.



inadequacies of the Greek social system and the superstitions of Greek religion. Life in Greece, as in other civilizations, was subject to reverses, and there was great instability both in the fate of the individual and in the social system. It is not surprising that pessimism attracted so many outstanding minds.

Moreover, this feeling for the tragic sense of life was part of the Greek doctrine of fatalism: Fate dominates all, the gods and man alike. Not even Zeus can defy the dictates of fate. Man is invariably punished when he oversteps his limits. The same happens to the gods, for they, too, have definite functions and if they infringe upon the privileges of their divine colleagues, retribution and disaster result.

This concept of fatalism did not make for a static view of life, for it established a cosmic order in which everyone had a definite function and a definite purpose. And we shall find that philosophers like Plato and Aristotle stressed the importance of an orderly universe, an orderly state, a systematic ethical idea. They abhorred chaos and disorder.

Metaphysically, it was taught that the Greek gods did not create the universe out of nothing; rather, the gods were limited by the material environment. Mythology pictured a chaos which antedated even the existence of the gods. This theory explains why Greek thinkers frequently believed in the eternity of matter.

The Greek view of life was *cyclical*. Thus, there was no definite belief in progress. The Golden Age was thought to be part of the past, not somewhere in the future. For example, Hesiod described five ages of history. The first he called the Golden Age, in which men lived like the gods, free from toil, pain, and trouble. It was a period of peace and plenty in which men knew no strife, nor were they envious of their neighbors. They were not afraid of death, for, as Hesiod explained, it was regarded as a natural phenomenon and appeared like a gentle sleep. This race of men was rewarded for its goodness; hence, they became godlike spirits.

The next age was the Age of Silver. In this age the race of men was not so sublime as the first race: "But when at last [these men] came to the full measure of manhood, they lived but for a little while, and suffered by their folly; for they could not keep their hands from violent outrage one upon another, nor would they do service to the Immortals or make sacrifice upon the holy altars of the blessed gods after the lawful manner of men in every land. Then Zeus in his anger put them away, because they paid not due honors

to the blessed gods who dwell in Olympus. Now, after that this race also was hidden in the earth, they are called by men Blessed ones of the underworld, second in rank; yet they too are attended with honor."<sup>4</sup>

The third age was the Bronze Age, during which men delighted in warfare: ". . . they were strong and terrible, and delighted in deeds of dolorous war and in insolence. They ate no bread, but their heart was stout and adamant, unapproachable; their strength was great, and invincible the arms that grew out of the shoulders upon their thick-set frames. Their weapons and their dwellings were of bronze, and with bronze they wrought; dark iron was not yet. These, slain by their own hands, went to the cold dark house of Hades, nameless. Terrible though they were, black death took them, and they left the bright light of the sun."<sup>5</sup>

Then came the fourth race, the race of Heroes: "Now after that this race also was hidden in the earth, Zeus made yet a fourth race upon the bountiful earth, a divine race, better and more righteous, of Hero men, that are called demigods, the race that was aforetime upon the boundless earth. They were destroyed by evil war and dread battle."<sup>6</sup>

The last age, to which Hesiod himself belonged, was the Age of Iron, subject to turmoil and evil: "For now indeed is the race of Iron. They shall rest not by day from labor and trouble, nor from the spoiler in the night season; and the gods shall give them grievous cares. The father shall not be like to his children, nor the children to their father; the guest shall not be true to the host that shelters him, nor friend to friend, nor brother true to brother as in the old days; parents shall grow quickly old and be despised, and shall reproach their children with bitter words. Wretches that know not the visitation of heaven! Such as these would not repay their old parents for their nurture. He that keeps his oath or is just or good shall not find favor; but they shall honor rather the doer of wrong and violence. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

What is significant in this view of history is Hesiod's belief in the fall of man. It was his wish that he had been born at another time, and constantly he asked, Why do I have to live amidst such dis-

<sup>4</sup> Hesiod, *Works and days*, 109, translated by Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

trekking circumstances? Thus he looked forward to another age in which, the cycle having been completed, real goodness and peace and plenty would again prevail.

Homer and Hesiod represent two divergent attitudes regarding the Goods of life. Homer affirmed and rejoiced in human existence. With picturesque detail he portrayed the feasts and exploits of an aristocratic society. Hesiod, on the other hand, wrote about the common people. In him a strain of puritanism prevailed; aristocracy to Hesiod implied dissipation and oppression. Thus, he looked back to the Golden Age, in which real purity of morals and a just social system had been the rule.

### THE GREEK VIEW OF IMMORTALITY

In Greek civilization the accepted view of the afterlife was rather hazy and indistinct. The souls of the deceased were pictured in Hades, where they lived a vague and shadowy existence. As a typical example, we can cite Odysseus' visit to the underworld, where he finds his mother:

"And I mused upon her words and desired to embrace the shade of my dead mother. Thrice I started forward to embrace her as my heart bade me, and thrice she escaped from my arms like a shadow or a dream, and the grief grew ever sharper in my heart. And I cried aloud, speaking to her winged words:

"'O my mother, why dost thou not stay for me who long to embrace thee, that even in the place of Death we may put loving arms about each other and find cold comfort in weeping? Is this indeed but a phantom that Queen Persephone has sent me, that I may grieve and lament yet the more?'

"And straightway my lady mother answered:

"'O me, my child, ill-fated beyond all other men, Persephone, daughter of Zeus, doth not deceive thee, but this is the way with mortals when they die: the sinews no more hold together the flesh and bones, but they are overmastered by the force of the strong burning fire, as soon as the life has left the white bones, and the shade hovers like a dream and flits away.'"<sup>8</sup>

He also meets Achilles, who says: "Seek not to console me for death, glorious Odysseus. I would rather be on earth as the hired servant of another, in the house of a landless man with little to live upon, than be king over all the dead."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI. 11, 204, 475 (*ibid.*, pp. 17-18).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

But there was another view of immortality which became increasingly popular. It was taught by the Mystery religions, of which there were two main types in Greece: the Eleusinian and the Orphic Mysteries. The Eleusinian Mysteries, which arose in the 7th century B.C., promised immortality to all their members and were characterized by elaborate initiation ceremonies, secret oaths, and a general attitude of mysticism. They centered around the story of Persephone, daughter of Demeter and Zeus, who was taken away by the god of the underworld to be his wife. Naturally the mother could not reconcile herself to the loss of her daughter. Everywhere she looked for her, and finally she discovered Persephone's fate. Demeter was so greatly outraged that she revenged herself by punishing mankind. She saw to it that famine descended upon the earth. In the meantime, Zeus began to fear that human beings would not worship him if they lost all their worldly goods. Thus the episode ended in a compromise, with Persephone spending half the time with the god of the underworld and half the time with her mother. When she is with the latter, spring and light flourish on the earth; when she is in the underworld, darkness and winter prevail.

We may wonder how this story was connected with the concept of immortality. The answer is that Demeter, it was thought, had revealed the mysteries of life to the Eleusinians. Because of her message man is not to be afraid of death but to look forward to a new and blessed life.

Another question emerges. Did these Mysteries demand high moral ideals? Did they require a change of heart? The answer again is quite definite: The moral attitude was secondary; what mattered most was active participation in this religion and the acceptance of its theological requirements. In short, it was verbal allegiance rather than moral reformation which was demanded by the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Quite different from the Eleusinian Mysteries was Orphism, which was connected with Dionysus, the god of wine and passion. At first its ritual was extremely savage and probably involved human sacrifice. There was intoxicating music made effective by kettle-drums and cymbals. The theology of this cult explained that man is a dual creature, possessed of both good and evil; he is a descendant of the Titans who devoured Dionysus, the son of Zeus and Persephone. This act of the Titans was instigated by Hera, who thereby exhibited her jealousy of Persephone. Yet the heart of Dionysus was

saved. Zeus ate it and produced another offspring, being aided this time by a human mother, Semele. Being rather curious, Semele wanted to see her divine lover, but she was punished for her impudence and destroyed by Zeus. Her child, however, was kept alive, and Zeus made him the ruler of the world.

The story explains how Dionysus became central in the cult. The ritual dedicated to him was anything but restrained, for Orphism attempted to approach divine perfection; man and God were to become one. This belief caused a sense of alienation on the part of the worshiper, whose soul was regarded at first as being in a state of sin. Thus a series of transmigrations was necessary, at the end of which final bliss and union with the divine power could be achieved.

To accomplish this goal, Orphism prescribed many ascetic practices and favored vegetarianism. In this religion we find the body viewed as a source of evil—a contrast with the prevalent Greek view, which regarded man's body as the source of goodness and perfection.

In these Mystery religions, another side of the Greek character emerges. In promising definite immortality and in preaching an emotional awareness of life, the Mysteries had more appeal for the multitude than had the religion of Homer, which pictured the gods in humanistic terms. Strangely enough, these Mysteries, especially Orphism, had important followers in philosophical circles. Traces of the movement can be found in such outstanding thinkers as Socrates and Plato. As ancient civilization declined and as it lost its vigor and confidence, these cults gained more and more followers and ultimately played a prominent role in technical thinking.

Throughout the history of philosophy, we find a conflict between the emotionalism of the masses and the rational detachment of the thinkers. At first it seems scarcely possible that the two attitudes could meet or that they could be combined. Yet, the more we read and the more we appreciate the history of philosophy, the better we understand the close connection between the two attitudes. In certain periods of decline—such as the Hellenistic Age, the 3rd and the 4th century A.D., and perhaps the 20th century—the religion of the masses becomes all-powerful and establishes definite dogmas, categorical ideals, and absolute rules of conduct. Thus faith becomes supreme, and irrationality is accepted; the philosopher frequently becomes a medicine man and a rationalizer for the established institutions.

## THE GREEK VIEW OF MAN

Another prominent trait of Greek civilization was its emphasis upon the *golden mean*. As we have noted, this doctrine did not prevail in the religious Mysteries, but it dominated much of the artistic endeavor and much of the best ethical thinking in Greece. It implied a close association between art and morality. The good life, according to the Greek mind, was one which adhered to the laws of proportion and harmony and was conscious of the limitations of man's existence.

As early as Homer we find that the external goods of life were regarded with a touch of Epicureanism. The heroes of Homer enjoyed their existence; they were not ascetic and were not burdened by a sense of humility. Most of the Greeks had no understanding of an ethical attitude which makes man completely submissive and a creature of nothingness praying to an all-powerful God.

The Greek view of man stressed the importance of honor, and it can be likened to the Renaissance view of "virtu." It is not moral perfection which counts but, rather, the development of high-mindedness. The great man, according to Aristotle, knows his accomplishments, is conscious of his elevated status in life, and is not hypocritical by being overly modest about his merits. Some of us might find him extremely conceited, but it must be remembered that our tradition is different, for it stems back to the Christian view of the unworthiness of man, whereas Aristotle believed in the infinite potentialities of the human being.

Yet there was another tradition in Greek civilization which was quite different from the ethical system of Aristotle. It is symbolized by Plato's concept of life. In Plato, as we shall see, there are the beginnings of asceticism, almost a trace of the Christian outlook upon life. Plato believed in absolute righteousness, in responding to evil by turning the other cheek. It is no wonder that Nietzsche, who admired a heroic attitude, regarded Plato as a representative of decadence.

Today we are especially conscious of the Greek athletic ideal, which united mental and physical prowess. The Olympic Games were illustrative of this spirit, for the victor received such awards that he was willing to sacrifice almost anything to reach his goal. In Greek education, the demands of the body were not neglected. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle gave a detailed outline of physical training. The purpose of athletics was not only to pro-

duce certain physical traits but to enrich the moral life of the citizen.

At the same time, as we have seen, the proponents of asceticism gained ground, especially in the Mystery religions. The Greeks were conscious of a basic dualism between the body and the mind. At first, this dualism did not affect very greatly the course of civilization. Thus, in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. the naturalistic spirit was still strong; but after the Peloponnesian War, in the Hellenistic Age, the otherworldly attitude became more pronounced, and ancient philosophy was more and more concerned with the conflict between man's soul and his physical desires.

Another important part of the Greek ideal of life was the belief that man could find himself only in his fulfillment of *public* functions. This view was especially dominant in Athens, where every citizen took part in the political life of the community. To live an isolated existence and to dwell only upon subjective problems were regarded as unnatural. This distinguished Greek society from the medieval pattern of life. In Greek society the city-state was the unifying agency, while in the Middle Ages it was man's personal quest for salvation as represented by the Church.

Again a note of caution! The political emphasis in Greek civilization produced an attitude of cynicism. From the time of Plato, many thinkers regarded the perfection of the state as an impossible task. Hence it was thought that man must be a refuge unto himself, since he could not rely upon social institutions. Thus the philosophy of the Cynics found vigorous exponents during the Hellenistic Age. It indicated that the interests of man were shifting, for in periods of decline the possibilities of political life are limited whereas the potentialities of the inner life appear to be immense. In the 20th century we find many of the best young people completely disgusted with political conditions. As a consequence, this "lost generation" concentrates upon an introspective pilgrimage and exhibits an existentialist perspective. It was different during the climax of Greek civilization, when a more balanced view of life prevailed and it was thought possible to achieve complete satisfaction in political and social affairs.

Finally, it must be remembered that Greek society was mainly *patriarchal*. Women, especially in Athens, occupied an inferior position; very seldom did they achieve the intellectual level of men. Their time was spent at home supervising the slaves and carrying on a multitude of domestic activities. Thus, we hear little about

romantic love in Greek literature and much more about friendship, especially between men. Occasionally a few intellectual women emerged, like Aspasia and Sappho, but they had to pay heavily for their romantic conquests and their independence.

In later times, women achieved a greater degree of emancipation. In these periods they were less subject to the dictates of men and had better facilities for education, but still there was no complete equality of the sexes. Thus we read in Euripides:

"Surely, of creatures that have life and wit,  
We women are of all things wretchedest,  
Who, first, must needs, as buys the highest bidder,  
Thus buy a husband, and our body's master  
So win—for deeper depth of ill is this.  
Nay, risk is dire herein,—or shall we gain  
An evil lord or good? For change is shame  
To woman, nor may she renounce her spouse.  
And, coming to new customs, habits new,  
Seer need she be, to know the thing unlearned,  
What manner of man her couch's mate shall be.  
But if we learn our lesson, if our lord  
Dwell with us, plunging not against the yoke,  
Happy our lot: if not—no help but death.  
For the man, when at home they fret his soul,  
Goes forth, and stays his loathing heart's disgust,  
Unto a friend or age-mate turning him.  
We have but one, one heart to seek for comfort.  
But we, say they, live an unperilled life  
At home, while they do battle with the spear.  
Falsely they deem: twice would I under shield  
Stand, rather than bear childbirth peril once."<sup>10</sup>

In summary, it must be pointed out that while naturalism generally prevailed in Greek culture, there are also evidences of mysticism and metaphysical dualism. We find that the overly enthusiastic proponents of classicism have exaggerated the serenity of the Greek spirit and that a one-sided view results when we see the Greek ideal of life mainly as an expression of poise, reason, and harmony. In considering the Greek ideals of life we find basic contradictions, which, as we shall see, found a prominent place in philosophical speculations.

<sup>10</sup> Euripides, *Medea*, 230-251.



QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Compare the spirit of Hellenic civilization with that of the Orient.
2. In what ways was the Greek view of life naturalistic?
3. What were the fundamental beliefs of the Mystery religions?
4. Compare and contrast Greek polytheism with Christian monotheism.
5. How did Hellenic religion influence philosophical beliefs?
6. What was the Greek view of the afterlife?
7. What are some of the fundamental contradictions of the Greek spirit?
8. Why did the Greeks usually lack a sense of sin?
9. What are some of the reasons for the widespread tolerance in Hellenic civilization?
10. Describe the patriarchal spirit of Greek life.
11. How would a Greek thinker criticize 20th-century American civilization?
12. What, in your opinion, were some of the main weaknesses of the Hellenic world-view?
13. What are the permanent contributions of Hellenic culture?
14. Describe the secular basis of Greek life.
15. Why did the Greeks disregard scientific applications?

# THE BEGINNING OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY

. . . . .

## THE ENVIRONMENT

Greek philosophy was born on the coast of Asia Minor. The site was not accidental, for in this region there were a constant interchange of ideas and a mingling of many cultures. Here, East and West came together, and the Orient and the Occident met on equal terms. In these city-states along the coast of Asia Minor, there were vast riches and also much poverty, especially at Miletus, where Thales was born. Miletus carried on an enormous amount of trade; its wealth could scarcely be estimated. It was the destination of many caravans, which brought with them not only goods but new ideas and new concepts of life.

But Miletus was living in a constant state of insecurity, for powerful neighbors were determined to annex its territory. At first the Lydians threatened, and it appeared as if they would subdue it. But the Milesians fought back and were able to prevent foreign domination. While the other cities along the coast of Asia Minor were under Lydian hegemony, Miletus remained as powerful as before.

Then the Persians conquered the Lydians. In the beginning the Greeks did not realize how great the Persian danger was. Indeed, many of the rulers of the city-states in Asia Minor joined the Persian ranks.

The last great ruler of Miletus was Aristagoras. At first he, too, collaborated with the Persian king; but then a conflict broke out between the two, and Aristagoras turned to the Greeks for help. He made a desperate plea at Sparta for assistance but spoke to deaf ears. In Athens his message was received more favorably; the Athenians supported him, and other Greek city-states followed their example. Being an excellent diplomat, Aristagoras gave up some of his dictatorial privileges and established a democratic government in Miletus.

In 499 B.C., the combined forces of the Greeks subdued Sardis, but soon reverses occurred. The Persians gathered a powerful army and navy, and in 494 Miletus fell. The results of this conquest were far-reaching. The Persians appeared irresistible, and their victories can be compared with the German triumphs of 1940.

Ironically enough, the Persians were supported by the Phoenicians and Egyptians, who were envious of the naval and mercantile power of Miletus. Both hoped, if Miletus were destroyed, to dominate the Mediterranean and achieve great prosperity. And, too, the Persians had in their ranks many Greek collaborators who despised democratic government and democratic ideals.

The fate of Miletus was somewhat like that of Poland under Germany during World War II. Most of the male citizens were killed, while many of the women and children were enslaved. Thus ended the dominance of Milesian philosophy, and the center of thinking shifted first to southern Italy and Sicily and later to Athens.

So much for the political conditions. To appreciate the intellectual vigor of the Milesians, we must realize that they were immigrants who had left the mainland in search of wealth and a better way of life. They were not burdened by past traditions and, like modern Americans, they were secular in their outlook on life. Frequently they were ruled by tyrants, who, however, made many social reforms and contributed to the growth of culture. To us, as to most of the Greek thinkers, the word *tyrant* has a most unpleasant connotation, but we must not be misled. Tyrants like Periander at Corinth and Pisistratus at Athens added immensely to the arts and sciences. Many of the tyrants were determined to lift the general standard of thinking. Like the despots of the Italian city-states

in the Renaissance, they built huge buildings and employed poets, painters, and sculptors. Nor were they averse to philosophical ideas as long as the philosophers remained conservative in their political opinions. Later, of course, Plato had a most unpleasant experience with a tyrant at Syracuse, and he was naturally somewhat prejudiced on the subject of tyranny. We must not gainsay, however, the contributions of the tyrants of the 6th century B.C. to the growth of intellectual life.<sup>1</sup>

### THE INTELLECTUAL ATMOSPHERE

The 6th century B.C. thus was an age of change and flux in which there was little political stability. As we have seen, foreign conquerors threatened; hence, one day Miletus might be supreme and the next day its glories only a memory. We find the same instability in intellectual matters: the Mystery cults were gaining ground, and they filled Greece and the colonies with closely-knit brotherhoods which regarded themselves as superior to followers of the orthodox religion. Their initiates were usually bound together by strict rites, and if they revealed the secrets of the orders they were liable to be killed by the enraged members.

While fervent religious ideas developed, there was greater intellectual skepticism, and the Homeric gods were re-examined more closely. Penetrating questions were asked regarding their nature and their origin. We shall find that thinkers such as Xenophanes and Heraclitus challenged the anthropomorphism and the credulous attitude of the masses.

It was a century in which the problem of *evil* achieved real prominence. Preoccupation with this problem usually occurs in periods of intellectual maturity. The poets, especially, were wondering how the omnipotence of the gods could be reconciled with the existence of earthly misery. The philosophers, likewise, were conscious of this basic metaphysical contradiction. For example, we find in the writings of Empedocles a sense of pessimism and alienation and a feeling that he was banished from the happy circle of the gods.

### THALES

Thales (c. 624-546), the father of Greek philosophy, is surrounded by a veil of mythology, for we know little about his life although we have an abundance of legends. There are many stories regarding

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Botsford, *Hellenic history*, p. 75.

his manifold scientific accomplishments. He is supposed to have predicted an eclipse which took place in 585 B.C. It is possible that he obtained his astronomical knowledge from the Babylonians. There is a story that he went to Egypt, where he learned what the Egyptians had done in the field of geometry. He made some contributions to the science of mathematics. He is said to have measured the height of the pyramids by the shadows they cast and to have determined the distance from the shore of a ship at sea. He also tried to explain scientifically the overflow of the Nile.<sup>2</sup>

In ancient times Thales was also famous for his ethical contributions, but again we have no specific evidence of his beliefs. He was counted among the Seven Wise Men, and it is possible that he taught a morality based on reason and that he held such maxims as "Know thyself" and "Nothing to excess."

According to Aristotle,<sup>3</sup> Thales seems to have been rather shrewd in his business dealings. He is said to have once cornered the olive market and thus showed that a philosopher can be a practical man as well as a master speculator. And Aristotle relates how Thales bought up all the olive presses because he thought there would be an abundant harvest.

Politically, also, Thales was a penetrating and keen judge of human affairs, for he advocated a Pan-Ionian confederation, without which he thought the Ionian city-states would not be able to maintain their independence. He realized that Persia would become all-powerful and that the sovereignty of the small states could not remain inviolate. The rulers of his time, however, were too pre-occupied with their petty squabbles to listen to him and they laughed at his suggestions for establishing a central capital which would unite all the Greek colonies.

The idea of Pan-Hellenic union agitated other thinkers—for example, Gorgias, and to some extent, Plato. Like many modern philosophers, they realized that small political units were outmoded and that narrow nationalism could not survive.<sup>4</sup> But usually the statesmen who were in power regarded such ideas as highly abstruse and impractical, only to find out in the course of time that their own

<sup>2</sup> Regarding his mathematical knowledge see Cantor, *Vorlesungen über Geschichte der Mathematik*, vol. 1, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> It must be remembered that Aristotle was not a reliable historian of pre-Socratic philosophy; cf. Cherniss, *Aristotle's criticism of pre-Socratic philosophy*, pp. 374-375.

<sup>4</sup> The most adequate account of the development of Greek federalism can be found in Ferguson, *Greek imperialism*.

realism was not justified by the actual turn of political events. In reality, their concepts of politics were much more obsolete than the idealistic reflections of the philosophers.

Returning to Thales, his philosophical fame is founded mainly upon one fragment in which he shows that everything is contained in *water*. Water, to him, was the *basic* principle of the universe. To a modern observer such a conclusion appears at first glance to be rather naive, since we think in terms of atoms and electrons and according to the Einsteinian concept of the universe. But, it must be remembered, Thales had no scientific apparatus. He was rather bold in speculating in these ways, for his views were completely divergent from the accepted cosmology, which traced all natural principles back to divine causes.

We do not know how Thales came to the conclusion that the world-stuff is water. Perhaps he may have been influenced by the many forms which water takes or by the fact that water is necessary to sustain life. He explained the position of the earth as floating on water like a piece of wood. All this appears to be rather elementary when viewed in the light of 20th-century science.

According to other accounts, Thales spoke of the soul as being endowed with the power of motion and being full of gods, a tenet, however, which must not be taken literally. It must be remembered that the Milesians as yet made no sharp distinction between the immaterial world and man. Everything, according to them, is alive and moving. Hence, there is no ground for a theistic or spiritual interpretation of this viewpoint. The Milesians regarded nature as a vital force, forever alive and in motion; this view contrasts strongly with the 18th-century standpoint, which viewed matter as being inert.

What is the lasting significance of Thales? The answer is, He raised an important question: What is the nature of the world-stuff? His curiosity set off a chain reaction which caused a veritable philosophical revolution. He tried to verify his studies not by an appeal to religion or to faith but by mathematical means, and in this way he contributed to the growth of Greek science.

### ANAXIMANDER

To Anaximander, water was too specific a substance, and in its stead he substituted as the primary world principle the *boundless*. Anaximander, who lived c. 610-545, came from a noble family, and

he led Milesian immigrants to found a new colony. It is believed that he published his philosophical prose work in 546. Unfortunately we have only a few fragments of his treatise.

The primary substance, according to Anaximander, has no visible limits. It is eternal and uncreated. To some extent this concept anticipated the modern view of infinity. It is a doctrine which is rich in imaginative insight, for according to Anaximander the world has no spatial limits. Indeed, he spoke of a plurality of worlds. Whether they existed together, as Burnet<sup>5</sup> assumed, or whether they arose one after another, as Zeller<sup>6</sup> believed, we cannot say with certainty. His view definitely indicated an expansion in the cosmic picture, for it implied that our sphere is not the only planet and that the earth does not occupy a privileged position in the cosmic scheme. Certainly his philosophical views were far superior to those of medieval thinkers, who had a narrow astronomical outlook and accepted with almost no exception the geocentric hypothesis of the universe.

Anaximander, moreover, spoke about an eternal motion which characterizes the activity of the boundless. He tried to explain that the world was formed by a separation of opposite qualities, such as the warm and the cold. At first a sphere of flame surrounded the earth, somewhat as the bark encloses a tree. Later the sphere was broken up into parts and hence "the sun, the moon, and the stars arose."

In another fragment Anaximander says, "And from what source things arise, to that they return of necessity when they are destroyed; for they suffer punishment and make reparation to one another for their injustice according to the order of time. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

Many varying interpretations of this statement have been given. Some scholars regard it as a trace of Orphism, as referring to the wicked state of mankind; others view it in a more sober light, for it must be remembered that the Greeks generally did not view existence as a sin. What Anaximander probably meant was that everything in the universe has a definite place, and that if it did not confine itself to its limits, it would have to make reparation. In short, the universe is governed by an *orderly* process.

Again, we find Anaximander to be very suggestive in his view of the evolution of man, for, unlike medieval thinkers, he did not speak

<sup>5</sup> Burnet, *Early Greek philosophy*, pp. 62-66.

<sup>6</sup> Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, pp. 234 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Simplicius, *Phys.* 6r, Nahm, *Selections from early Greek philosophy*, p. 62.

of special creation. According to him, in the beginning man had been a fish and his evolution was the same as that of other animals. In his original form, Anaximander noted, man was quite different, for if he had been subjected to a long period of suckling he would not have survived. ". . . the first animals were generated in the moisture, and were covered with a prickly skin; and as they grew older, they became drier. . . ."<sup>8</sup> All this appears to be rather nebulous, but it indicates wide scientific curiosity. Furthermore, Anaximander had a variety of practical interests. Thus, he constructed a globe of the heavens and invented a sundial. In geography, also, he was active, and he made a map which was famous in ancient times.

In his astronomical views Anaximander stated: "The earth is a heavenly body, controlled by no other power, and keeping its position because it is the same distance from all things; the form of it is curved, cylindrical like a stone column; it has two faces, one of these is the ground beneath our feet, and the other is opposite to it."<sup>9</sup>

As to the stars, they "are a wheel (circle) of fire, separated from the fire about the world, and surrounded by air. There are certain breathing-holes like the holes of a flute through which we see the stars; so that when the holes are stopped up, there are eclipses. The moon is sometimes full and sometimes in other phases as these holes are stopped up or open. The circle of the sun is twenty-seven times that of the moon, and the sun is higher than the moon, but the circles of the fixed stars are lower."<sup>10</sup>

Anaximander held the earth to be a cylinder in form, with its depth one third of its breadth. Moreover, according to his theory, the circle of the moon is nineteen times as large as the earth.

If we contrast the theories of Anaximander with those of Thales, we find a real advance. First of all, Anaximander was more *detailed* in his cosmological description than Thales. Second, Anaximander tried to give a scientific explanation of how the universe arose; namely, by his doctrine that out of the boundless, opposite qualities were created. Third, Anaximander was suggestive in his concept that cosmology should avoid any theory of spatial limitation. This implies a belief in a plurality of worlds and the existence of other worlds besides our own. Fourth, he stimulated Greek philosophy in his theories regarding the origin of man. In noting that man is

<sup>8</sup> Hipp., *Phil.* 6 (*ibid.*, p. 65).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.



part of the animal world, he sounds strikingly modern and almost anticipated Darwin.

### ANAXIMENES

Like the other Milesian philosophers, Anaximenes left few fragments of his work, and with him the Milesian tradition closes. It is quite certain that he was younger than Anaximander; he is said to have died around 524 B.C.

The main principle according to Anaximenes is *air*; from it arise all things, including both human beings and gods. He described air as always in motion and as holding the world together. To him, air also had a subjective connotation. Thus he compared it with the work of the soul: just as the soul is the unifying principle of man's life, so the air holds the universe together.

Now it may be asked, Why did Anaximenes choose this principle as the cosmic substance? Of course, no definite answer can be given, but perhaps he was influenced by the fact that air is necessary to sustain life and that it undergoes a variety of transformations in fire and in vapor. While air, according to Anaximenes, has a definite nature, it is boundless and not subject to any spatial limitation. He also called it divine. Here again, it is important not to identify Anaximenes with a spiritual approach. As yet there was no clear distinction between material and immaterial things. By divine he probably meant that air is a superior principle and a key to cosmic change.

How can this cosmic movement be conceived? Anaximenes answered, by *rarefaction and condensation*: "When air is dilated so as to be rarer, it becomes fire; while winds, on the other hand, are condensed air. Cloud is formed from air by compression (felt-ing); and water when it is compressed farther, and earth and finally stones as it is more condensed."<sup>11</sup>

The earth, he maintained, was formed by compression and it rests on air: "Similarly, the sun and the moon and all the rest of the stars, being fiery bodies, are supported on the air by their breadth. And stars are made of earth, since exhalations arise from this, and these being attenuated become fire, and of this fire when it is raised to the heaven the stars are constituted. There are also bodies of an earthly nature in the place occupied by the stars, and carried along with them in their motion. He says that the stars do not move under the earth, as others have supposed, but around the earth, just as a cap

<sup>11</sup> Hipp., *Phil.* 7. *Dox.* 560 (*ibid.*, p. 66).

is moved about the head. And the sun is hidden not by going underneath the earth, but because it is covered by some of the higher parts of the earth, and because of its greater distance from us."<sup>12</sup>

Regarding other phenomena of nature Anaximenes stated, "... winds are produced when the air that has been rarefied is set in motion; and when it comes together and is yet further condensed, clouds are produced, and so it changes into water. And hail is formed when the water descending from the clouds is frozen; and snow, when these being yet more filled with moisture become frozen. And a rainbow is produced when the sun's rays fall upon thick condensed air."<sup>13</sup>

Some of Anaximenes' other speculations are worthy of note. For example, he thought that the stars are fixed nailheads in the crystal-line vault and that the earth has the shape of a table. The sun, he taught, is broad, like a leaf. He tried to explain the cause of earthquakes, which he attributed to the dryness and moisture of the earth.

The influence of Anaximenes in ancient times was far-reaching. In fact, he surpassed Anaximander in significance, according to later Greek philosophers. Probably we would reverse this judgment and place Anaximander above Anaximenes. Some of his speculative theories found their way into the philosophy of the Atomists, who likewise regarded the earth as a disk and neglected the theory of spheres outlined by the Pythagoreans. Diogenes of Apollonia adopted most of Anaximenes' principles and accepted air as the basic world-stuff.

What is the final significance of Anaximenes? He showed that there can be a basic relationship between the *external* principle of reality and *subjective* states. The world-stuff appears both as air and in the form of the soul. Moreover, by his principle of condensation and rarefaction, he gave a scientific explanation of change. In astronomy he made a clear distinction between the planets and the heavens of fixed stars. He was interested in various other scientific phenomena, such as earthquakes. Unfortunately we do not have any fragments by Anaximenes dealing with the evolution of man.

## THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MILESIANS

What characterizes the Milesian philosophy is its scientific spirit. Its foremost problem was the universe, not man. We shall see later

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

that the process was reversed in the time of the Sophists, when *man*—his needs, his desires, and his ideals—became the foremost concern of philosophy.

What is especially appealing in the Milesian philosophy is the lack of partisanship and prejudice. As yet the philosopher is not the defender of a pet theory or pet institution, nor is he the spokesman for an established belief; instead, he deals impartially with all cosmological phenomena.

Some of the Milesian theories may appear to us fantastic. This is only natural but, we must remember, we can speculate with the aid of scientific instruments. Still, in the perspective of history, our accomplishments may appear to be just as insignificant to the future as the conclusions of Milesian science are to us. We must not forget the debt we owe it, for it was largely responsible for the beginning of mathematics, astronomy, and geology.

It is interesting to note that popular mythology seems to have had little influence on the speculations of the Milesians. They were emancipated thinkers; hence, later on they were frequently charged with being atheists.

We must stress the Milesian use of analogy. As yet there was no clear distinction between the subjective and the objective world and between man and nature. Thus we find Anaximander using a moral principle to bolster up his scientific conclusions. To some extent the Milesian concept of the universe was extremely poetic. The world, according to these philosophers, is alive and pulsating and involved in a process of ceaseless motion. All in all, their philosophy was an excellent foundation for the more sophisticated theories of cosmology which followed.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What role did the tyrants play in the spread of culture?
2. Describe the fate of Miletus.
3. In what ways did political factors influence the rise of philosophy?
4. Can philosophy develop without an atmosphere of leisure?
5. What is the basic world-stuff, according to Thales?
6. Why did the Milesian thinkers neglect immaterial factors in their cosmology?
7. What is the significance of Anaximander?
8. In what ways was Anaximander amazingly modern?
9. What is the basic world-stuff, according to Anaximenes?
10. How did Anaximenes explain astronomical phenomena?
11. What are the lasting contributions of the Milesian thinkers?

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PYTHAGOREANS

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## PYTHAGORAS

There are few details about the life of Pythagoras, and the circumstances of his career are surrounded by a host of legends. We are told that he visited many countries, such as Arabia, Syria, and India; but modern research regards these accounts as spurious.<sup>1</sup> He was born at Samos and studied assiduously in his youth. During Pythagoras' mature years, Polycrates, who was almost a Machiavelian figure with no moral scruples, set up a dictatorship at Samos which stifled the spirit of free inquiry. Consequently Pythagoras left Samos and, since he was interested in medicine, went to Croton, which had an excellent medical school.

At Croton, the fame of Pythagoras became widespread. He admitted both men and women into the order which he established there. Naturally this co-educational idea appealed to his followers. He is said to have supplemented the education of the women with training in the domestic arts.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Zeller, *Outlines of the history of Greek philosophy*, pp. 31-34.

The Pythagoreans established a brotherhood with secret initiation ceremonies and strict vows, which also had to be kept secret. It was almost a monastic order with emphasis on vegetarianism. We find a prohibition of beans and other precepts which link the order to ancient taboo concepts.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it is quite probable that such precepts as "Do not stir the fire with a knife" or "Do not overstep the beam of a balance" are not to be taken literally. The first probably means that we are not to swell the pride of the great; and the second, that we are not to violate the balance of justice and equity. In short, the teachings of Pythagoras had a popular meaning and an allegorical meaning revealed only to the initiates.

In the Pythagorean order there was a spirit which reminds us somewhat of the religious ideals of the Middle Ages. For example, the order stressed rigorous self-examination. At the end of the day the members of the brotherhood would examine themselves concerning their wrongdoings and with regard to how successful their activities had been in promoting a good life. They shared all their goods and in this way probably influenced the development of Plato's political ideals.

Politically their sympathies were mostly with the aristocratic party. This attitude finally caused their downfall, for in the 5th century B.C. in southern Italy the democratic movement grew stronger and finally overthrew the aristocratic regime. The result was the disintegration of the order, and migration took place. Later we find the Pythagoreans at Tarentum and in Athens.

According to ancient tradition, Pythagoras lived a saintly life, never indulged in sensuality, and was moderate in all his habits. He never told a joke which was off-color or in bad taste. His authority in the order was almost absolute.

We have only a few scant details about his personal beliefs. It is quite certain that he accepted the doctrine of transmigration. Piety, to him, was the first law of religion:

" . . . Pythagoras conceived the rule of the gods to be most efficacious for the establishment of righteousness, and he took that rule as the higher principle for the ordinance of the constitution and laws and of justice and legal rights. It may be well to add some of his particular injunctions. The Pythagoreans learnt from him to think it profitable to believe that the divine exists and looks down upon the human race and cares for it. . . . They rightly regarded the living creature as turbulent by nature and various in its

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Burnet, *Early Greek philosophy*, p. 106.

inclinations, appetites, and other passions, so that it needs the threatening of a superior power to chasten it and reduce it to order. They thought, therefore, that every man, conscious of the variety of his nature, should never forget worship and piety towards the divine, but always keep in mind the power that watches over human behavior."<sup>3</sup>

The life of Pythagoras was god-centered, and his followers accepted this fundamental belief:

"All their injunctions with regard to conduct aim at converse with the divine. This is their starting-point; their whole life is ordered with a view to following God, and this is the governing principle of their philosophy, because it is absurd that mankind should seek their good from any other source than the gods. It is as if the citizen of a country governed by a king should pay respect to some subordinate ruler, and disregard the king himself who rules over all. They think that mankind behave in that sort of way. For since God exists and has authority over all, and it is acknowledged that good should be sought from him that has authority, and all give good things to those whom they love and take delight in, and evil to those whom they hate, it is clear that we should do those things that are pleasing to God."<sup>4</sup>

Pythagoras also pursued scientific studies which had an enormous influence on the development of philosophy. He was interested in geometry, astronomy, and music. He viewed the earth not as being flat, as the Milesians had, but as being spherical and occupying the center of the universe. This viewpoint, it appears, was changed by the later Pythagoreans.

★ To Pythagoras we probably owe the use of the term *philosophy*. To him it meant the love for wisdom. A man who is interested in the contemplation of the divine, according to Pythagoras, represents the highest type. On the other hand, there are two inferior types: those who are merely intent upon worldly success and honor, and those who live the life of the senses and think only of their pleasures. This threefold division—*lovers of wisdom, lovers of success, lovers of pleasure*—is significant. It indicates that the Pythagorean ideal was one in which the intellectual elite would triumph and everyone would fulfill his rightful function. It is no wonder that the sympathies of the Pythagoreans lay mainly with the aristocracy.

<sup>3</sup> Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean life*, 174, Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Pythagoras had a high regard for philosophy. To him it was not only a search for a first principle but a way of life leading to religious salvation. The philosopher, then, in many ways seemed to him to be like a religious priest who points out the right direction to the confused multitude. The philosopher, he thought, sees beyond the pleasures of the present and concentrates upon the search for eternal verities.

### ALCMAEON

The scientific interest of the Pythagoreans was represented especially well by Alcmaeon, who, though considerably younger than Pythagoras, was likewise very brilliant. His main work was in medicine. According to him, health is based on a harmonious distribution of certain qualities, such as bitter and sweet, dry and wet. Illness results when one quality predominates and causes disorder. Alcmaeon was interested in the structure of the brain, and he realized that it is responsible for the activities of man's mental life. He used the empirical method in his physiological studies and did not impose metaphysical principles upon his scientific conclusions.

Alcmaeon advanced psychology by distinguishing between knowledge through the senses and rational thought. Animals, he believed, are dependent upon sense experience, whereas man can achieve rational understanding. Still, man's knowledge is limited compared with that of the gods, for he is guided mainly by hypotheses which cannot be verified. But the gods, Alcmaeon asserted, possess complete certainty. He stressed the immortality of the human soul, an emphasis which gives a spiritual twist to his teachings.

### PHILOLAUS

Like Alcmaeon, Philolaus was interested in medicine. The body, according to him, is dominated by two influences—a warm substance and a cold substance. The health of the individual depends upon the right proportion of warmth and cold. In general, Philolaus appears to have been rather agnostic; and, unlike Alcmaeon, he taught that the soul is the harmony of the body, and when the body passes away the soul experiences the same fate.

### HIPPODAMUS

The architect Hippodamus of Miletus clearly exhibits the influence of Pythagorean ideas. He is mentioned in Aristotle's *Politics* as the first utopian writer. Hippodamus had high regard for the number

three, which he believed to be sacred. Thus, he outlined three main classes in the division of the state, a procedure which later was followed by Plato. Furthermore, in describing the legal system, Hippodamus adopted a threefold division.

In this connection it must be noted that the Pythagoreans contributed to the worship of numbers. This mysticism had a lasting impact upon the ancient world, and it continued throughout the Middle Ages to modern times. The number three, for example, was regarded as divine by Scholastic writers and even by Dante, who divided the *Divine comedy* into three parts: hell, purgatory, and paradise.

Hippodamus himself was less superstitious than the Scholastics. He used scientific principles in town planning, especially at Rhodes, and his architectural construction served as a model for the artists of the ancient world.

### THE LATER PYTHAGOREANS

The history of the later Pythagoreans witnessed a split between scientific and religious interests. Some Pythagorean philosophers continued to adhere to the strict practices of the founder and lived ascetic lives. Many of them shunned all the conveniences of society and went around like beggars. Sometimes they even starved themselves. Yet the order produced distinguished mathematicians, such as Eurytus, who was imbued with the importance of number symbolism. According to Eurytus, numbers characterize all beings; and he represented them by geometrical figures.

The most impressive figure in the later Pythagorean movement was Archytas of Tarentum, who lived in the 4th century B.C. and was befriended by Plato. He was especially occupied with the problem of motion. Matter, he asserted, is dynamic, and the same principle extends to the soul and to the heavenly bodies. In his personal life he preached self-control and, according to ancient testimony, completely lived up to his ideals. Like Pythagoras, Archytas avoided all sensual pleasure and was humane in his regard for his fellow men.

### THEOLOGY OF THE PYTHAGOREANS

The theology of the Pythagoreans was based to a great extent on Orphic teachings, and thus they accepted the concept of reincarnation. Man's soul, they taught, has fallen from its divine purity. After death it is purified in Hades, and then it comes back to earth in a new transmigration. Pythagoras himself told of many former



states of being. He even thought he had taken part, in an earlier reincarnation, in the siege of Troy. The goal of life, according to the Pythagoreans, is complete release from this cycle and ultimate reunion with the divine forces.

Like the Orphics, the Pythagoreans were dualists. They felt that man's essence lies in the soul, which they held to be superior to the body. The body perishes and is the seat of passions which are purely ephemeral. The soul, however, is immortal. They divided the soul into three parts: intelligence, reason, and the heart. They described the pilgrimage of the soul in the following way:

"When the soul is cast out [of the body] it wanders in the air over the earth in the likeness of the body. Hermes is warden of souls and hence is called Conductor, Keeper of the Gates, and God of the Underworld, for it is he that brings in the souls from their bodies, whether from land or sea. The pure souls are led to the highest region, while the impure do not consort with them nor with one another, but are bound by the avenging spirits [Erinyes] in bonds that cannot be broken. All the air is full of souls, which are called Spirits and Heroes. It is they who send to men dreams and signs of sickness or of health; and not only to men, but to cattle and other beasts. Rites of purification and expiation have reference to these beings, and so has the whole art of divination, omens, and the like."<sup>5</sup>

The object of religion, thus, is the conversion of the soul to goodness. Wickedness, the Pythagoreans felt, could never be triumphant for it represents a state of sickness. Full conversion demands a rigorous process of purification together with moral righteousness:

"For mankind, the greatest thing is the conversion of the soul to good or to evil. Men are happy when they possess a good soul, but they are never at rest. . . . Virtue and health are harmony, and so is all goodness and God. Thus the universe is a harmonious system. . . .

"Worship should be paid to gods and heroes, but not with equal honors. We should worship the gods at all times with reverent speech, wearing white garments and being in a state of purity; the heroes should be worshiped only after midday.

"Purity is effected by rites of purification, lustration, and aspersion; by keeping clean from contact with funeral ceremonies, childbirth, and every kind of taint; and by abstaining from the flesh of animals that have been eaten or have died, from mullet and

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius, viii, 25 (*ibid.*, p. 68).

melanurus [a fish], from eggs and animals that lay eggs, and from beans and the other things forbidden also by those who perform the rites of initiation in the sanctuaries."<sup>6</sup>

### PYTHAGOREAN COSMOLOGICAL DOCTRINES

The cosmology of the Pythagoreans was closely related to their religious ideals. In their doctrine of reality we find a dualism which reminds us of Persian religion, except that the Pythagoreans expressed it in more mathematical terms. The conflict is between two forces: the *Unlimited* and the *Limited*. The Unlimited, they taught, represents the principle of chaos, aggression, and aggrandizement while the Limited stands for order. At first the Unlimited was supreme. If we can visualize this condition, we must picture the universe as complete darkness and disorder, upon which the Limited arose and with it fire and light.

This metaphysical dualism creates moral opposition, for the Unlimited stands for evil and wickedness while the Limited represents goodness. The Unlimited, the Pythagoreans held, is symbolized by feminine qualities. The Limited, on the other hand, is masculine. This opposition is continued by the dualism of many qualities, such as day and night, wet and dry, square and round.

The conflict between the Unlimited and the Limited represents the spirit of Greek thinking. To the Greeks, the infinite was the principle of negation and of evil, whereas the finite was the source of goodness and made for cosmic adjustment. Thus we have the legend of Prometheus, who was punished by the gods for overstepping the bounds of human aspiration. In this sense the Greeks were quite different from modern thinkers, who frequently regard the infinite as the source of man's real power. Hence, Goethe's *Faust* is the story of man's *infinite* aspirations and *infinite* longings. The Greeks would not have appreciated the Faustian idea because they worshiped symmetry, order, and harmony.

### SCIENTIFIC INTERESTS OF THE PYTHAGOREANS

In science as in metaphysics, the Pythagoreans made a fundamental contribution. The Egyptians had already made definite beginnings in science, but the Pythagoreans showed that mathematics is not merely a practical activity but has important *theoretical* conse-

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

quences. The Pythagoreans regarded mathematics as the most important science. Did it not develop clarity? Did it not stimulate man in the consideration of eternal things? Pythagoras himself is responsible for several theorems, and it is said that he regarded his conclusions as signs of heavenly inspiration.

This connection between mathematics and religion is noteworthy. We find it again in later times, especially in Pascal and Descartes, both of whom combined mathematical interests with religious devotion. The religious strain was especially strong in Pascal, who, although he was a brilliant mathematician, accepted a faith based on authority.

The science of geometry was elaborated by the Pythagoreans. They made it severely logical, dividing geometry according to axioms, theorems, and demonstrations. In arithmetic they likewise made advances by classifying numbers, studying proportions, and applying geometrical principles to it. They were certain that all things can be expressed according to their numerical relationship. They even had numbers for marriage and justice. *Number to them was the principle of reality.*

In this way the Pythagoreans anticipated the spirit of modern science, which likewise is based on mathematical proportions. Chemistry and physics could not develop until certain mathematical improvements had been made, and throughout the 19th and 20th centuries changes in mathematics, such as the innovation of non-Euclidean geometry, produced a revolution in our physical theories. However, modern science is not concerned with the application of numbers to moral ideas but, unlike Pythagoreanism, regards mathematics as a pragmatic and functional discipline, not as a preparation for theology.

In astronomy the Pythagoreans also made basic advances. Pythagoras himself believed the earth to be spherical. His later followers stated that the earth, as well as other planets, moves around a central fire. This is almost an anticipation of the heliocentric theory; but ancient and medieval thinkers refused to accept it and, instead, believed that the earth is the center of the universe.

To explain eclipses, the Pythagoreans accepted the existence of a counter-earth. They maintained that there are ten bodies moving through the heavens, for ten they thought is the perfect number. The air around the earth, they asserted, is motionless, and all things in it are mortal; but the uppermost air is always in motion, and all things in it are divine.

They accepted the popular belief in stating that the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies are gods. They believed that heat prevails in the uppermost spheres of the universe and is the cause of all life. Man, then, is akin to the gods because he partakes of heat. In this view, again, we notice the fundamental dualism between the earth and the heavens. Naturally, the Pythagoreans felt, the heavens are superior to the earth, and a different physical composition characterizes their structure. This view generally was accepted in the Middle Ages; and it prevailed until the Renaissance, when thinkers like Galileo and Copernicus showed that the same laws apply both to the heavens and to the earth.

### ESTHETIC THEORIES OF THE PYTHAGOREANS

The Pythagoreans contributed greatly to the science of harmonics. They realized that tunes can be expressed according to numerical ratios. They spoke about the *music of the spheres*, which, however, human ears cannot detect. Music thus played an important role in their philosophy. It is connected with man's moral traits, they said; for example, warlike tunes develop in man a bellicose character, whereas melancholy tunes create a spirit of pessimism and fatalism. Music, the Pythagoreans felt, can also change our spirits and make us joyous and exuberant as well as lethargic and listless. They believed that music can be a valuable tool of education and improve the intellectual and esthetic standards of mankind.

In their concept of harmony, the Pythagoreans expressed a far-reaching esthetic ideal. Harmony to them appeared as the principle of goodness and order. It governs, they said, the movement of the planets and dominates the constitution of the human body. Harmony characterizes the world of the gods. It is the task of man to imitate this divine harmony and to achieve complete proportion in his physical, moral, and intellectual life.

According to the Pythagoreans the function of art, thus, is imitation. Art is the key to reality and reminds man of his divine origin and the possibility of eternity.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PYTHAGOREANS

The Pythagorean order represents a mixture of science and religion. Primarily it was a religious cult interested in salvation and determined to achieve a release from the cycle of birth and death. Thus,

its scientific interest most of the time was subordinated to religious ideals and to the quest for reunion with the divine. Nevertheless it gave impetus to scientific studies, particularly in the fields of mathematics, music, and astronomy.

The Pythagoreans showed that philosophic speculation can be an end in itself, that it ennobles the mind of man and brings about an attitude of detachment and objectivity. To some extent they were like Spinoza, interested in seeing life in relation to eternity.

At the same time, the Pythagoreans contributed to the development of a dualistic attitude. They pointed to the conflict between the Unlimited and the Limited, darkness and light, good and evil. This conflict became especially strong in later years, when a revival of the movement took place and its religious aspects were triumphant.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the fundamental contributions of Pythagoras?
2. What was the Pythagorean concept of religion? Compare the Pythagorean view with Catholicism.
3. What were some of the taboos of Pythagoreanism?
4. Describe the dualism of the Pythagorean system.
5. Why did the Pythagoreans favor the principle of order?
6. What were the moral ideals of the Pythagoreans?
7. In what ways were the Pythagoreans primitive in their world-view?
8. How did the Pythagoreans contribute to the progress of music?
9. What were the esthetic views of Pythagoreanism?
10. List some of the thinkers who contributed to Pythagoreanism and describe briefly their contributions.

## HERACLITUS

. . . . .

### THE APOSTLE OF CHANGE

**H**eraclitus (c. 544-484 B.C.) was among the most brilliant of all the Greek philosophers. In him we find the germ of some of the most revolutionary modern theories, such as relativity, the identity of opposites, and the belief that change governs all things.

About his life we have few details, but we know he was born in Ephesus and came from a noble family. He was a high priest—an office which was hereditary in his family. In every way he was aristocratic. He hated the common man, and he looked down upon vulgar opinions. At the same time, he was no friend of tyranny. He had contempt for Homer and Hesiod and thought himself superior to all other philosophers. As he explained, he did not accept the teachings of anyone. Wisdom, to him, was a subjective, personalistic process, which could not be acquired by mathematical constructions or by the memorization of philosophical theories handed down by predecessors.

We must appreciate the environment in which Heraclitus lived. Ephesus, his native city, had acquired great wealth and had taken the place of Miletus, which had fallen into complete oblivion. It

contained many shrines, and to it came pilgrims from all parts of Greece. They were especially attracted to the shrine of Artemis, the guardian deity of the city. But prosperity and political power had not made the citizens of Ephesus wise, for they were governed by mediocre politicians and frequently persecuted their best and wisest men. It is not surprising that Heraclitus looked down on the masses.

Heraclitus generally expressed his views in a vague style; hence they are subject to different interpretations. He starts his philosophy by showing that truth is difficult to understand and that most men lack wisdom:

"Not on my authority, but on that of truth, it is wise for you to accept the fact that all things are one.

"This truth, though it always exists, men do not understand, as well before they hear it as when they hear it for the first time. For although all things happen in accordance with this truth, men seem unskilled indeed when they make trial of words and matters such as I am setting forth, in my effort to discriminate each thing according to its nature, and to tell what its state is. But other men fail to notice what they do when awake, in the same manner that they forget what they do when asleep.

"Those who hear without the power to understand are like deaf men; the proverb holds true of them—'Present, they are absent.'


"Eyes and ears are bad witnesses for men, since their souls lack understanding.

"Most men do not understand such things as they are wont to meet with; nor by learning do they come to know them, though they think they do.

"They know not how to listen, nor how to speak."<sup>1</sup>

Heraclitus was quite certain that much learning does not produce wisdom. Did not Pythagoras have great knowledge? Did not Hesiod possess prolific learning? Still, he insisted, wisdom cannot be attained in a quantitative way, for nature is difficult to explore and "loves to hide."

## THE UNIVERSE OF HERACLITUS

According to Heraclitus, the universe is in a constant process of change. Cool things become warm, and warm things grow cool.  "You could not step twice in the same rivers; for other and yet

<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus, frags. 3, 4, 5, 6, Nahm, *Selections from early Greek philosophy*, p. 89.

other waters are ever flowing on.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, if we want to understand the cosmic life, we must realize that it is dynamic. It is not in a state of rest, nor is it inert; rather, it is vibrant and dominated by motion and change. The task of the philosopher, then, is to explain the change: to show why it is necessary, and how it functions.

—This change, affirmed Heraclitus, produces an identity of opposites. He implied that contrary qualities go together. For example, we conceive of light only because there is darkness; we appreciate summer because of winter; we value goodness because of evil. A world of isolated qualities which would be purely good, or purely evil, is incomprehensible to us. The universe itself is beyond good and evil; it contains both alike and indicates their essential identity.

It may now be asked, What is the fundamental stuff that characterizes the universe? Heraclitus answers, *fire*. In discussing him, Diogenes Laertius tells us:

“Coming to his particular tenets, we may state them as follows: fire is the element, all things are exchange for fire and come into being by rarefaction and condensation; but of this he gives no clear explanation. All things come into being by conflict of opposites, and the sum of things flows like a stream. Further, all that is is limited and forms one world. And it is alternately born from fire and again resolved into fire in fixed cycles to all eternity, and this is determined by destiny. Of the opposites that which tends to birth or creation is called war and strife, and that which tends to destruction by fire is called concord and peace.

“Change he called a pathway up and down, and this determines the birth of the world. For fire by contracting turns into moisture, and this condensing turns into water; water again when congealed turns into earth. This process he calls the downward path. Then again earth is liquefied, and thus gives rise to water, and from water the rest of the series is derived. He reduces nearly everything to exhalation from the sea. This process is the upward path.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus we have in Heraclitus an upward and a downward path. Both are necessary and have cosmic significance; whereas during the summer fire goes upward, during the winter it goes downward.

<sup>2</sup> Frags. 41-42 (*ibid.*, p. 91).

<sup>3</sup> Diogenes Laertius, Bks. 4, 9, 8-12 (*ibid.*, p. 96).



Heraclitus was interested in astronomy, in which he used the principle of exhalation. He claimed that exhalations from the earth are dark whereas those from the sea are bright and pure:

"Exhalations arise from earth as well as from sea; those from sea are bright and pure, those from earth dark. Fire is fed by the bright exhalations, the moist element by the others.

"He does not make clear the nature of the surrounding element. He says, however, that there are in it bowls with their concavities turned toward us, in which the bright exhalations collect and produce flames. These are the heavenly bodies.

"The flame of the sun is the brightest and hottest; and other stars are further from the earth and for that reason give it less light and heat. The moon, which is nearer to the earth, traverses a region which is not pure. The sun, however, moves in a clear and untroubled region, and keeps a proportionate distance from us. That is why it gives us more heat and light. Eclipses of the sun and moon occur when the bowls are turned upwards; the monthly phases of the moon are due to the bowl turning round in its place little by little.

"Day and night, months, seasons and years, rains and winds and other similar phenomena are accounted for by the various exhalations. Thus the bright exhalation, set aflame in the hollow orb of the sun, produces day, the opposite exhalation when it has got the mastery causes night; the increase of warmth due to the bright exhalation produces summer, whereas the preponderance of moisture due to the dark exhalation brings about winter. His explanations of other phenomena are in harmony with this."<sup>4</sup>

### THE LOGOS

This method of reasoning brings us to Heraclitus' doctrine of the *logos*, which governs the change. He thought that all the transformations are orderly and that the universe is dominated by laws. ~~He himself probably did not give a metaphysical meaning to the logos.~~ To him it meant simply discourse or wisdom; but later commentators, especially the Stoics, stressed a metaphysical interpretation of the logos and regarded it as "divine wisdom."

The function of the logos in Heraclitus' world-scheme is manifold. The logos provides for order and for a definite outline of the cosmic structure. It sees to it that bounds are kept and chaos does not prevail. The logos has a moral meaning as well, for, according

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

to Heraclitus, heavenly bodies are governed by moral laws, especially by the dictates of justice. In every way the world of nature and the world of morality can be identified. The result is that nature obeys the dictates of equity, that it is rational and law-abiding, not chaotic and tyrannical. If we want to understand the universe, Heraclitus advised, we must turn our minds to the *logos*. It is the measure of perfection and the criterion for human legislation. It is true that man's world is imperfect and quite inadequate, but when man sees the entire structure of the universe, Heraclitus thought, he understands the majesty and perfection of the world process.

### *ETHICAL IDEALS OF HERACLITUS*

What is noteworthy in the ethical concepts of Heraclitus is his preoccupation with strife. War is the father of all things, he claimed, and those who want to banish conflict are dominated by illusion. Eternal peace simply means a condition of indifference and lethargy. In this thinking he reminds us of Nietzsche and Treitschke.

The ideal of life, as taught by Heraclitus, is one of rigorous mental discipline. It distinguishes the wise man from the masses, who are engaged in trivial and insignificant endeavors. The philosopher becomes somewhat of a superman; still, his wisdom compared with that of the gods is limited, for man is called a baby by the gods, often as a child is so called by man.

To some extent Heraclitus was a pessimist, for he thought birth a misfortune and death a boon. At any rate, here again we find an identity of opposites: Life implies death, and death implies life. Plutarch comments on this statement and quotes Heraclitus as stating:

"It is the same thing in us that is alive and dead, awake and asleep, young and old. For the former shift and become the latter, and the latter shift back again and become the former.

"For as out of the same clay one can mould shapes of animals and obliterate them and mould them again and so on unceasingly, so nature from the same matter formerly produced our ancestors, and then obliterated them and generated our parents, and then ourselves, and then others and yet others, round and round. The river of birth flows continually and will never stop, and so does that opposite stream of destruction which the poets call Acheron and Cocytus. So the same first cause that showed us the light of the sun brings also the twilight of Hades. Perhaps we may see a similitude of this in the

air around us, which makes alternately night and day, bringing on life and death, sleep and waking."<sup>5</sup>

It is necessary for us to understand Heraclitus' doctrine regarding the structure of the soul. He taught that the dry soul is the best, whereas the wet soul is inferior. The soul becomes wet when man is dominated by sensual pleasures. This state is especially evident in intoxication. The dry soul he identified with wisdom and with the perception of the underlying structure of the universe. Quite possibly, he believed that the wise man is immortal and that he may become godlike after death. The wet soul, on the other hand, goes downward and experiences a bitter fate.

In his religious theories Heraclitus inveighed against the popular rites, for he thought that worshipers celebrated the Mysteries in an unholy way. He attacked magicians and all those who believe in superstition:

"For if it were not to Dionysos that they made the procession and sang the song with phallic symbols, their deeds would indeed be most shameful; but Hades and Dionysos are the same, to whomever they go mad and share the revel.

"I distinguish two kinds of sacrifices: those of men altogether purified, which would occur rarely, as Heraclitus says, in the case of a single individual, or of some very few men easily counted; secondly, those that are material and corporeal and composite through change, such as are in harmony with those who are still restrained by the body.

"They purify themselves by defiling themselves with blood, as if one who had stepped into the mud were to wash it off with mud. If any one of them should observe him doing so, he would think he was insane. And to these images they pray, just as if one were to converse with men's houses, for they know not what gods and heroes are.

"If they are gods, why do ye lament them? And if ye lament them, no longer consider them gods."<sup>6</sup>

In these passages, again, we find evidences of Heraclitus' independence. It is difficult to know exactly how he felt about the current Mysteries. Some commentators state that he advocated them.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch, *Consolation to Apollonius*, 106E; Heraclitus, frag. 88, Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, p. 82.

<sup>6</sup> Frags. 127, 128, 130, 130A (Nahm, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pfeleiderer, *Die Philosophie des Heraklit von Ephesus im Lichte der Mysterienidee*.

This view, however, can scarcely be supported. He had his own concept of the gods, and it differed considerably from the popular anthropomorphism.

### THE INFLUENCE OF HERACLITUS

Heraclitus had an important impact upon the history of ancient philosophy. His metaphysical system became the foundation of the Stoic doctrines. It influenced the development of Philo; with some modifications it entered into the Christian logos theory.

Heraclitus' greatness was appreciated by Hegel, who likewise used paradoxes in his philosophy and believed that the universe is governed by an unending conflict between thesis and antithesis, out of which a synthesis emerges. In modern philosophy, thinkers like Bergson and Dewey have resurrected the concept of change. In the metaphysics of Bergson, the world is governed by a vital impulse which obeys no formal laws and is irresistibly forging ahead. In Dewey's instrumentalism, static ideals are excluded and the dynamic aspect of reality is stressed.

In Heraclitus we find a most vigorous spirit. He stands rather isolated among his contemporaries, for whom he felt great contempt. Like Nietzsche, he lived alone and believed in an intellectual aristocracy.

Generally speaking, the spirit of Heraclitus did not prevail in ancient times. Greek thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle were more concerned with permanence than with change and more interested in the forms which govern phenomena than in the transformations of the objective universe.

We may wonder why philosophy traditionally has been governed by this static viewpoint. There are many reasons for this attitude. In the first place, philosophers have tried to escape into an immaterial, changeless realm and thus have looked down upon the world of flux. In the second place, the mathematical view has dominated much of philosophy and, as we know, mathematics is concerned primarily with absolute concepts and invariable theories. Thus thinkers have made a definite distinction between the realm of impermanence and the realm of eternity, and they have cherished a sentimental fondness for the latter. In the third place, philosophers traditionally have been occupied with the concepts of *absolute* truth, *absolute* beauty, and *absolute* justice. These ideals they cannot find in everyday life or in social institutions; naturally they prefer their own utopias, in which perfection reigns.

This, however, was not the spirit of Heraclitus. He realized that nothing remains at rest and that conflict governs all progress.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did Heraclitus regard the masses? What 19th-century thinker shared the same views?
2. What is the meaning of the logos doctrine?
3. How did Heraclitus express the principle of reality?
4. What were the astronomical views of Heraclitus?
5. What was Heraclitus' attitude regarding other philosophers?
6. What modern thinkers have adopted the world-view of Heraclitus?
7. Discuss the statement of Heraclitus that "war is the father of all things." Can civilization advance without war? Explain your answer.
8. What are the weaknesses of the Heraclitean concept of the flux?
9. What is the basic world-stuff according to Heraclitus?
10. Do you agree with Heraclitus that opposites are identical? Defend your answer.
11. What are the implications of the Heraclitean philosophy?

# THE BEGINNING OF METAPHYSICS

. . . . .

## XENOPHANES

**X**enophanes was born at Colophon, which city he left when the Persians conquered it in 545 B.C. Unlike Heraclitus, he did not come from a noble family. In fact, he had to earn his living as a poet; and one of the kings whom he met felt contempt for him because of his poverty. He had a keen understanding of the cities and countries which he visited, and this knowledge contributed to the skepticism so evident in his philosophy. As a reformer he had definite moral ideals and feared that civilization was being engulfed by enervating luxury and the new cult of atheism.

It appears that even in ancient times brawn was worshiped above brain. The winners of the Olympic Games were celebrated as great heroes, whereas the wise men were neglected and frequently lived an anonymous existence. In a fragment, Xenophanes complained about this state of affairs:

“But if one wins a victory by swiftness of foot, or in the pentathlon, where the grove of Zeus lies by Pisas’ stream at Olympia, or as a wrestler, or in painful boxing, or in that severe contest called the

pancration, he would be more glorious in the eyes of the citizens, he would win a front seat at assemblies, and would be entertained by the city at the public table, and he would receive a gift which would be a keepsake for him. If he won by means of horses he would get all these things although he did not deserve them, as I deserve them, for our wisdom is better than the strength of men or of horses. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

This was not all. Xenophanes believed that the citizen would be ruined by the new luxuries from Lydia. Like the Hebrew prophets, he urged a simple way of life. He told how the citizens exhibited themselves in the market place, proud and arrogant, dressed in purple garments and richly perfumed. All these influences he regarded as effeminate.

In another fragment he prescribed how men should worship and how they should exhibit self-control:

"For now the floor is clean, the hands of all and the cups are clean; one puts on the woven garlands, another passes around the fragrant ointment in a vase; the mixing bowl stands full of good cheer, and more wine, mild and of delicate bouquet, is at hand in jars, which says it will never fail. In the midst frankincense sends forth its sacred fragrance, and there is water, cold, and sweet, and pure; the yellow loaves are near at hand, and the table of honor is loaded with cheese and rich honey. The altar in the midst is thickly covered with flowers on every side; singing and mirth fill the house. Men making merry should first hymn the god with propitious stanzas and pure words; and when they have poured out libations and prayed for power to do the right (since this lies nearest at hand), then it is no unfitting thing to drink as much as will not prevent your walking home without a slave, if you are not very old. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In philosophy he attacked the popular concept of the gods. He had a rather sublime view of the deity:

"God is one, supreme among gods and men, and not like mortals in body or in mind.

"The whole (of god) sees, the whole perceives, the whole hears.

"But without effort he sets in motion all things by mind and thought.

"It [*i.e.*, Being] always abides in the same place, not moved at all, nor is it fitting that it should move from one place to another."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frag. 19, Nahm, *Selections from early Greek philosophy*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>2</sup> Frag. 21 (*ibid.*, p. 111).

<sup>3</sup> Frags. 1, 2, 3, 4 (*ibid.*, p. 109).

This concept implies real *monotheism*. Xenophanes pointed out that the universe is divine and that the cosmic principle is not subject to change and destruction. This idea contrasts with the popular view, which pictured gods according to human ideas and human desires:

"But mortals suppose that the gods are born (as they themselves are), and that they wear man's clothing and have human voice and body.

"But if cattle or lions had hands, so as to paint with their hands and produce works of art as men do, they would paint their gods and give them bodies in form like their own—horses like horses, cattle like cattle.

"Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all things which are disreputable and worthy of blame when done by men; and they told of them many lawless deeds, stealing, adultery, and deception of each other."<sup>4</sup>

The last passage, especially, shows that Xenophanes was primarily a moralist. He asserted that Homer and Hesiod had distorted the nature of the gods by picturing them as immoral. Naturally their theory encouraged the citizens to imitate the behavior of the gods. To counteract this tendency, Xenophanes pictured gods who were completely moral and set a real example to the worshiper. Yet he pointed out that our knowledge of religion is incomplete and that everyone has a different concept of God and believes he has a special revelation. Thus in Xenophanes' philosophy we detect a strong note of skepticism, for *no certain truth can be achieved in theological matters*:

"Accordingly there has not been a man, nor will there be, who knows distinctly what I say about the gods or in regard to all things, for even if one chances for the most part to say what is true, still he would not know; but everyone thinks he knows.

"These things have seemed to me to resemble the truth.

"In the beginning the gods did not at all reveal all things clearly to mortals, but by searching men in the course of time find them out better."<sup>5</sup>

Xenophanes was just as skeptical about the doctrine of reincarnation. He poked fun at it in the following passage:

"Now, however, I come to another topic, and I will show the way. . . . They say that once on a time when a hound was badly

<sup>4</sup> Frags. 5, 6, 7 (*ibid.*, p. 109).

<sup>5</sup> Frags. 14, 15, 16 (*ibid.*, p. 110).



treated a passer-by pitied him and said, 'Stop beating him, for it is the soul of a dear friend; I recognized him on hearing his voice.'"<sup>6</sup>

In his cosmological speculations Xenophanes held that all things arise from earth and water. The sea, according to him, is the begetter of clouds, winds, and rivers. He believed that an infinite number of suns and moons exist and that the sun is formed each day from small fiery particles which are gathered together. As to the stars, they are "formed of burning cloud; these are extinguished each day, but they are kindled again at night, like coals; for their risings and settings are really kindlings and extinguishings. . . . The sun is composed of fiery particles collected from the moist exhalation and massed together, or of the burning clouds. . . . Eclipses occur by extinction of the sun; and the sun is born anew at its risings. . . . There are many suns and moons according to the different regions and sections and zones of the earth. . . . and at some fitting time the disk of the sun comes into a region of the earth not inhabited by us, and so it suffers eclipses as though it had gone into a hole. . . . The sun goes on for an infinite distance. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

He made some speculations regarding geology which are especially interesting in view of later discoveries:

"Xenophanes believes that once the earth was mingled with the sea, but in the course of time it became freed from moisture; and his proofs are such as these: that shells are found in the midst of the land and among the mountains, that in the quarries of Syracuse the imprints of a fish and of seals had been found, and in Paros the imprint of an anchovy at some depth in the stone, and in Melite shallow impressions of all sorts of sea products. He says that these imprints were made when everything long ago was covered with mud, and then the imprint dried in the mud. Farther he says that all men will be destroyed when the earth sinks into the sea and becomes mud, and that the race will begin anew from the beginning; and this transformation takes place for all worlds."<sup>8</sup>

In general, Xenophanes' cosmological theories were still primitive, especially his view that the stars are fiery clouds which glow at night and are extinguished by day. He was not systematic in his thoughts and wrote more as a poet than as a technical philosopher. He also had a philosophy of history. While the popular mind thought that technological progress comes from the gods, he realized that men

<sup>6</sup> Frag. 18 (*ibid.*, p. 110).

<sup>7</sup> Aet., *Plac.* 2. 13. *Dox.* 343 (*ibid.*, pp. 112-113).

<sup>8</sup> Hipp., *Phil.* 1. 14. *Dox.* 565 (*ibid.*, p. 113).

are responsible for it. Fire, thus, was not given by Zeus but is the invention of man. He believed that most people prize material things too highly and do not appreciate real wisdom.

All in all, Xenophanes' negative conclusions are more significant than his positive affirmations. More clearly than any other ancient writer, he described man's innate proclivity for anthropomorphism: his desire to form a concept of God according to his own experiences.

It is difficult for the philosopher to free himself completely from all anthropomorphic tendencies. Thinking naturally involves limitations. The philosopher, too, is frequently bound by the idol of the cave, the tribe, the market place, and the theater. He, too, is part of the tradition and the mores of his times. But the greatness of philosophy lies in its attempt to give an *impartial* view of reality, to see things in perspective, and to achieve a more refined and sophisticated concept of life. In all these matters Xenophanes made a remarkable beginning.

### PARMENIDES

Among ancient philosophers, Parmenides ranks among the foremost and most brilliant. Less skeptical than Xenophanes, he was interested in affirmations and in stating the nature of reality. He described two ways of life: one deals with truth, the other with illusion. The way of truth can be understood by the few whereas the masses naturally incline to the path of illusion.

Parmenides came from a very wealthy family. He lived most of his life in Elea, in southern Italy, and is reported to have visited Athens as an old man. He also had political interests and drew up a code of laws which governed his native city. Apparently he was early influenced by the Pythagoreans, who gave him his first philosophic instruction, but he rebelled against their views, especially against their cosmic dualism, and he pictured them later as adhering to illusions.

The question arises, How are we to evaluate his poem *The way of opinion*? Various explanations have been given. Some commentators have maintained that it represents a description of the behavior of phenomena;<sup>9</sup> others have asserted that it symbolizes the vulgar way of looking at things;<sup>10</sup> still others feel that it is an attack against his earlier allegiance to Pythagoreanism.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gomperz, *Griechische Denker*, 1, 2, ii, § 5.

<sup>10</sup> Fuller, *History of Greek philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 147.

<sup>11</sup> Burnet, *Greek philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 65-66.

At any rate, a dualism prevails in *The way of opinion*: "Men have determined in their minds to name two principles [lit., forms]; but one of these they ought not to name, and in so doing they have erred. They distinguish them as antithetic in character, and give them each character and attributes distinct from those of the other. On the one hand there is the ethereal flame of fire, fine, rarefied, everywhere identical with itself and not identical with its opposite; and on the other hand, opposed to the first, is the second principle, flameless darkness, dense and heavy in character. . . .

"But since all things are called light and darkness, and the peculiar properties of these are predicated of one thing and another, everything is at the same time full of light and of obscure darkness, of both equally, since neither has anything in common with the other."<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, in Parmenides' poem *The way of truth* there is complete monism. He asks, What is the standard for truth, and what is the criterion for reality? How must it be conceived? He answers categorically: It must be regarded according to logical consistency. His method was somewhat the same as that of Spinoza, who started with definitions and postulates. Like Spinoza, Parmenides assumed that *thought and Being are one*:

"It is necessary both to say and to think that Being is; for it is possible that Being is, and it is impossible that Not-being is; this is what I bid thee ponder. I restrain thee from this first course of investigation; and from that course also along which mortals knowing nothing wander aimlessly, since helplessness directs the roaming thought in their bosoms, and they are borne on deaf and likewise blind, amazed, headstrong races, they who consider Being and Not-being as the same and not the same; and that all things follow a back-turning course."<sup>13</sup>

What does his logical analysis reveal? It shows that there can be no paradoxes as Heraclitus asserted and that the law of contradiction prevails. To say then that night is day, or war is peace, is impossible. Instead, Parmenides speaks of the *absolute* existence of Being:

"There is left but this single path to tell thee of: namely, that Being is. And on this path there are many proofs that Being is without beginning and indestructible; it is universal, existing alone, immovable and without end; nor ever was it nor will it be, since it now *is*, all together, one, and continuous. For what generating of it

<sup>12</sup> *Concerning opinions* (Nahm, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118).

<sup>13</sup> *Concerning truth* (*ibid.*, p. 115).

wilt thou seek out? From what did it grow, and how? I will not permit thee to say or to think that it came from Not-being; for it is impossible to think or to say that Not-being is. What thing would then have stirred it into activity that it should arise from Not-being later rather than earlier? So it is necessary that Being either is absolutely or is not. Nor will the force of the argument permit that anything spring from Being except Being itself. Therefore justice does not slacken her fetters to permit generation or destruction, but holds Being firm."<sup>14</sup>

Being is not subjected to destruction or creation, nor can it be divided:

"Either Being exists or it does not exist. It has been decided in accordance with necessity to leave the unthinkable, unspeakable path, as this is not the true path, but that the other path exists and is true. How then should Being suffer destruction? How come into existence? If it came into existence, it is not Being, nor will it be if it ever is to come into existence. . . . So its generation is extinguished, and its destruction is proved incredible."<sup>15</sup>

Parmenides held that *time and change are part of the realm of illusion*. We believe in the flux because our senses deceive us. In reality, Being is always the same. "Farther it is unmoved, in the hold of great chains, without beginning or end, since generation and destruction have completely disappeared and true belief has rejected them. It lies the same, abiding in the same state and by itself; accordingly it abides fixed in the same spot. For powerful necessity holds it in confining bonds, which restrain it on all sides. Therefore divine right does not permit Being to have an end; but it is lacking in nothing, for if it lacked anything it would lack everything.

"Nevertheless, behold steadfastly all absent things as present to thy mind; for thou canst not separate Being in one place from contact with Being in another place; it is not scattered here and there through the universe, nor is it compounded of parts."<sup>16</sup>

There is nothing apart from Being, Parmenides continued, and the concepts we usually use are illusory, for we cannot speak of spatial change or of things arising and perishing.

"Therefore thinking and that by reason of which thought exists are one and the same thing, for thou wilt not find thinking without the Being from which it received its name. Nor is there nor will

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

there be anything apart from Being; for fate has linked it together, so that it is a whole and immovable. Wherefore all these things will be but a name, all these things which mortals determined in the belief that they were true, *viz.*, that things arise and perish, that they are and are not, that they change their position and vary in color."<sup>17</sup>

Being, Parmenides taught, is *spherical* and completely homogeneous: "But since there is a final limit, it is perfected on every side, like the mass of a rounded sphere, equally distant from the center at every point. For it is necessary that it should neither be greater at all nor less anywhere, since there is no Not-being which can prevent it from arriving at equality, nor is Being such that there may ever be more than what is in one part and less in another, since the whole is inviolate. For if it is equal on all sides, it abides in equality within its limits."<sup>18</sup>

What are the implications of Parmenides' doctrine? In the first place, his view of reality is directed against the concept of a dynamic universe. In the second place, it is a scheme which does not accept the evidence of the senses. He reminds us that we must rely on reason, which shows there is no change, no time, no motion, and no creation.

It would be a mistake to believe that Parmenides came to an immaterialistic conclusion. The Being about which he spoke is quite corporeal and in some ways resembles the world-stuff of the Milesians. He raised more questions than he could answer, especially regarding the nature of reality. Most of the eminent philosophers of ancient times spoke of him with great respect, which he richly deserved.

## ZENO

Parmenides was followed by Zeno, who ably developed the Eleatic philosophy. Zeno is described as very handsome and sharp-witted; and there are accounts of his visiting Athens together with Parmenides. It is reported that he was a great lover of liberty and a tireless opponent of tyranny. His writings have been lost, and so we must rely on second-hand accounts.

In his arguments Zeno used the method of dialectic, which was later perfected by Socrates. In the dialectic method we start our intellectual task by assuming the truth of an argument which we wish to oppose, and then expose its absurdity. It is a very subtle

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

weapon, which Zeno used with consummate skill. Turning to the opponents of Parmenides, he admitted for a moment the truth of their contention, but at once proceeded to point out their contradictions and fallacies.

Let us assume for the moment that reality is composed of many parts. What does this assumption imply? The whole must be the sum of the parts. But here we have a contradictory statement. Drop a grain and there will be no noise; yet drop a bushel of grain and certain sounds will be heard. How can we explain this? How can we understand this paradox? Does it not indicate that we cannot conceive of reality as the sum of many parts?

Take another example. Let us say that reality can be divided, as the opponents of Parmenides believed. Now let us carry on this process of division. We finally come to an indivisible unit, but in our imagination we can carry on the process of subdivision *ad infinitum*. Again a contradiction results. Reality then is finite and infinite; infinitely small and infinitely large. In Zeno's own words:

"If Being did not have magnitude, it would not exist at all. . . . If anything exists, it is necessary that each thing should have some magnitude and thickness, and that one part of it should be separated from another. The same argument applies to the thing that is in front of it, for that also will have magnitude and will have something in front of it. The same may be said of each thing once for all, for there will be no such thing as last, nor will one thing differ from another. So if there is a multiplicity of things, it is necessary that these should be great and small—small enough not to have any magnitude, and great enough to be infinite.

"For if anything were added to another thing, it could not make it any greater; for since greatness does not exist, it is impossible to increase the greatness of a thing by adding to it. So that which is added would be nothing. If when something is taken away that which is left is no less, and if it becomes no greater by receiving additions, evidently that which has been added or taken away is nothing."<sup>19</sup>

Parmenides had asserted that outside the sphere of Being, no space exists. If we admit that there is a space, Zeno declared, "it will be in something, for all Being is in something, and that which is in something is in space. So space will be in space, and so on *ad infinitum*. Accordingly, there is no such thing as space."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Frags. 1, 2 (*ibid.*, pp. 121–122).

<sup>20</sup> Frag. 4 (*ibid.*, p. 122).

Most famous are Zeno's paradoxes relating to motion. The pluralistic philosophy held that space is infinitely divisible. Now, Zeno asked, if this is so, how can we ever come to the end of it? We always traverse *half* the distance. This theory explains the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. Achilles can never catch the tortoise, for it is necessary that he should first reach the point from which the tortoise started. He will gain, but the tortoise will always be ahead.

Take another famous paradox. Look at the flying arrow. In reality the flying arrow is still, otherwise it could not be perceived. "As a moving body it is always in the present moment (in a space equal to itself)." Again we have a basic contradiction, declared Zeno, and he went on to show that it is better to accept the view of Parmenides that there is no motion.

Finally Zeno bolstered up the Eleatic position by giving another example:

"Half the time may be equal to double the time. Let us suppose three rows of bodies, one of which (A) is at rest while the other two (B,C) are moving with equal velocity in opposite directions [see Figure 1]. By the time they are all in the same part of the course, B will have passed twice as many of the bodies in C as A [Figure 2].

Figure 1

A			o	o	o	o
B	o	o	o	o		
C					o	o

Figure 2

A	o	o	o	o
B	o	o	o	o
C	o	o	o	o

"Therefore the time which it takes to pass C is twice as long as the time it takes to pass A. But the time which B and C take to reach the position of A is the same. Therefore double the time is equal to the half."<sup>21</sup>

What is the result of accepting the pluralistic hypothesis? We are caught in a fundamental paradox. Logic refuses to accept this contradiction and instead inclines to the view of Parmenides, who denied the reality of motion, change, and plurality.

The paradoxes have occupied many modern philosophers, especially Bergson and Bertrand Russell. As long as mathematics did not have a clear view of the infinite and the infinitesimal, no solution was forthcoming. In his book *Mysticism and logic* (ch. v) Russell gives a penetrating exposition of the paradoxes and shows how the

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

recent advances in mathematics have eliminated the validity of Zeno's standpoint.

The layman will probably smile at Zeno's conclusions. He will think it absurd to reject the reality of change and motion, but it must be remembered that philosophy tries to go beyond appearances in the search for a comprehensive view of reality. For this purpose Zeno used the method of dialectic. To him it was a tool which exposed illusion and the untrustworthiness of the senses.

### MELISSUS

With Melissus we come to the end of the Eleatic tradition. He was even more prominent in politics than Zeno, and we find him actively engaged in warfare against the Athenians. He was a commander of the fleet of Samos, and his opponent, strangely enough, was Sophocles, the great poet. He defeated the fleet of Sophocles; but his triumph did not last long, and Pericles in 439 B.C. forced the surrender of Samos. The terms were not exceptionally harsh, except that the fortifications of the city were to be torn down, tribute was to be paid, and the fleet turned over to the Athenians. Undoubtedly, Melissus was more successful in philosophy than in warfare.

Melissus agreed with Parmenides and Zeno that Being is indestructible, eternal, and uncreated. But he differed from Parmenides in a significant way, for he thought that Being is *infinite*, both spatially and temporally. He argued that if it were finite it would have a beginning and an end and would not be eternal.

Let us see how Melissus justified his conclusions. He showed first of all that Being cannot rise out of nothing, for how can it be generated out of nothingness? We cannot accept the pluralistic hypothesis, for this would imply a limitation of the absolute principle.

"So then the all is eternal and infinite and homogeneous; and it could neither perish nor become greater nor change its arrangement nor suffer pain or distress. If it experienced any of these things it would no longer be one; for if it becomes different, it is necessary that Being should not be homogeneous, but that which was before must perish, and that which was not must come into existence. If then the all should become different by a single hair in ten thousand years, it would perish in the whole of time.

"And it is impossible for its order to change, for the order existing before does not perish, nor does another which did not exist come into Being; and since nothing is added to it or subtracted from it or made different, how could any of the things that are change their



order? But if anything became different, its order would already have been changed.

"Nor does it suffer pain, for the all could not be pained; it would be impossible for anything suffering pain always to be; nor does it have power equal to the power of what is healthy. It would not be homogeneous if it suffered pain; it would suffer pain whenever anything was added or taken away, and it would no longer be homogeneous. Nor could what is healthy suffer a pang of pain, for both the healthy and *Being* would perish, and Not-being would come into existence. The same reasoning that applies to pain also applies to distress."<sup>22</sup>

Melissus pointed out that there is no emptiness in the universe, for emptiness implies that nothingness exists, which he thought impossible. He denied that *Being* moves or that it can be rare or dense or that it has a body, "for if it did it would have parts and would no longer be one."

His strongest argument, that *Being* is one only, is as follows: "For if a multiplicity of things existed it would be necessary that these things should be just such as I say the one is. For if the earth exists, and water and air and iron and gold and fire and the living and the dead and black and white, and everything else which men say is real,—if these things exist and we see and hear them correctly, it is necessary that each thing should be such as we first determined, namely, it should not change its character or become different, but should always be each thing what it is. Now we say that we see and hear and understand correctly; but it seems to us that hot becomes cold and cold hot, that hard becomes soft and soft hard, that the living being dies and life comes from what is not living; and that all these things become different, and what they are is not like what they were. . . . Evidently we do not see correctly, nor is the appearance of multiplicity correct; for they would not change their character if they were real, but would remain each thing as it seemed, for nothing is nobler than that which is real. But if they change their character, *Being* perishes and Not-being comes into existence. So then if a multiplicity of things exist, it is necessary that they should be such as the one is."<sup>23</sup>

Melissus was attacked rather harshly by Aristotle, who declared that he had violated the law of contradiction. However, Aristotle, it appears, did not understand the full impact of Melissus' theories.

<sup>22</sup> Frag. 7 (*ibid.*, p. 266).

<sup>23</sup> Frag. 8 (*ibid.*, p. 267).

Generally Melissus' thought was consistent, and he worked out the conclusions of the Eleatic school in excellent detail.

Again a word of caution! When Melissus spoke about Being, he did not imply a spiritual God but, rather, a *corporeal entity*. Spiritual ideals did not emerge until later Greek philosophy.

### HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE ELEATICS

The Eleatic school of philosophy made a permanent contribution to Greek thinking. It raised significant metaphysical problems, pointed out the fallacies of common-sense thinking, underlined the value of mathematics, and heightened an interest in logic. It was an excellent antidote for the philosophy of Heraclitus, who affirmed so strongly the reality of change and flux.

In the Eleatic system we have the beginnings of Platonism. No wonder that Parmenides occupied an important place in Plato's thinking, for Parmenides believed there must be a profound distinction between opinion and truth. As philosophy progressed in ancient times this distinction became more pronounced and more sharply drawn, and it found its climax in the Christian viewpoint, which puts the realm of the spirit as absolute reality and the realm of matter as the source of evil.

That thinking involves paradoxes has been noticed most clearly in modern times by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of pure reason*. Perhaps the most profound aspect of his work is his discussion of the antinomies, in which he shows that the universe can be conceived as both finite and infinite, determined and undetermined. According to Kant, reason can never give us complete reality. In this concept Kant differed from the Eleatics, who accepted reason as the key to truth.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why was Xenophanes opposed to the popular concept of the gods?
2. Is it possible for religion to get away from anthropomorphism? Justify your answer.
3. What was Xenophanes' concept of God? Do you agree with him?
4. How did Parmenides regard time and change?
5. How did Parmenides describe reality?
6. What are the paradoxes of Zeno? How can they best be defended?
7. What were the important events in the life of Melissus?
8. Describe the principal tenets of the philosophy of Melissus.
9. Compare the world-view of Heraclitus with that of the Eleatics.

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF PLURALISM

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## EMPEDOCLES

**E**mpedocles was born in Agrigentum, Sicily, which resembled Miletus in power and wealth. It was a city in which a bitter struggle was going on between the upper and the middle class. Various dictators arose who reigned in the name of the middle class. Especially important among them were Phalaris, who punished his enemies in the most merciless way by roasting them in an oven, and Theron, who was less harsh than Phalaris and under whom the city flourished. Empedocles himself was a leader of the democratic cause, and he hated tyranny. When the people offered him the position of king he refused, so strong were his democratic beliefs.

Agrigentum was a cosmopolitan city to which came traders from many parts of the Mediterranean coast. As a result its merchants became opulent, and its upper class indulged in luxurious living. We cannot appreciate the theories of Empedocles if we do not realize that many of his views were directed against the prevalent moral laxity.

The lifetime of Empedocles extended from c. 495 to 435 B.C. He witnessed the war with Syracuse, the attack of the Persians, and their consequent defeat. In 480 the Carthaginians attacked Sicily, and they were defeated by the combined forces of Agrigentum and Syracuse. In the same year the Persian fleet suffered a disastrous rout at Salamis. Athens was becoming the dominant city-state in Greece, and this fact changed the balance of power in the Mediterranean.

Empedocles exhibited a dual personality. On the one hand, he was profoundly religious, and he was worshiped as a man who could perform miracles.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, his science was up-to-date, and he anticipated many modern conclusions.

In his cosmology Empedocles accepted four fundamental principles: fire, water, earth, and air. He claimed that all things are composed of them. Thus, instead of one substance, as we find in the philosophy of Thales and the Milesians, he named several substances to explain the structure of the universe. Like the Eleatics, he maintained there is no void. But the question emerges, How does change arise? How can we describe the phenomenal world? Empedocles used two principles: *love* and *strife*. Love brings the elements together whereas strife separates them. Both are cosmic forces and corporeal. Frequently he used sexual terms to describe the action of love.

In a rudimentary form we have an anticipation of Freudian theory. This was noticed by Santayana in an essay entitled *Some turns of thought in modern philosophy*. Freud, too, described a basic conflict in the universe between the drive for life and the urge for death. It appears that to Freud the death principle was more powerful, for it led him to pessimistic conclusions and to a feeling that civilization was doomed.

Empedocles was more optimistic than Freud, at least in his cosmology. He described four stages:

The first stage witnesses the supremacy of love. The four elements are together in complete adjustment, and there is no knowledge of strife. It is almost a utopian condition.

The second stage sees the appearance of strife. Love now is less dominant. This is a period of disintegration. War enters the scene and with it untold human suffering. The only escape is through religion, which uses definite rites of purification and seeks a release from earthly suffering.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Zeller, *Pre-Socratic philosophy*, II, p. 119.

The third stage witnesses a complete dominance of strife, which now has exclusive mastery. Metaphysically, it indicates that the four elements are disunited. As a result earth, air, fire, and water are separated. Cosmic chaos has reached a climax; it makes individual existence impossible.

The fourth stage is the triumph of *love*. Again there are grounds for optimism. Signs of progress are apparent, for love enters and banishes strife. Individual things come into existence again, and the elements are reunited. This is not, however, the end of the world process according to Empedocles, for he, following the traditions of Greek thought, regarded life as a cycle which goes on endlessly and produces a multitude of worlds.

Empedocles' astronomical views are also significant. He held that "the ether was first separated, and secondly fire, and then earth, from which, as it was compressed tightly by the force of its rotation, water gushed forth; and from this the air arose as vapor, and the heavens arose from the ether, the sun from the fire, and bodies on the earth were compressed out of the others."<sup>2</sup>

He described two spheres moving in a circle around the earth. ". . . one [is] of pure fire, the other of air and a little fire mixed, which he thinks is night."<sup>3</sup>

His views of nature are startling. Plants, he thought, have capacity for sensation. Incidentally, he described the physiological structure of man with some degree of accuracy.

Many of Empedocles' theories were mythological. In his view of evolution, he taught that first primitive forms arose which had no sexual differentiation. Through the action of strife, they were divided into species. Some inhabited the earth; others took to water; while still others felt most at home in the air. Later, strange new forms arose, such as heads without necks and eyes without foreheads. There was an even greater mixture, resulting in the mating of creatures with unnatural descendants. For instance, there were offspring with the heads of oxen and the bodies of men.

Unlike Aristotle, Empedocles believed in a mechanistic theory of evolution. There is no concept of teleology in his philosophy; adjustment to the environment is all-important. Those forms which were not adapted to life perished; others, which showed greater power of adaptation, survived.

<sup>2</sup> Aet., *Plac.* ii, 6; *Dox.* 334, Nahm, *Selections from early Greek philosophy*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Plut. *Strom.* 10; *Dox.* 582 (*ibid.*, p. 142).

Empedocles stimulated epistemological discussion by his description of the work of the senses. His formula was that thought arises from what is *like*:

"Empedocles speaks in like manner concerning all the senses, and says that we perceive by a fitting into the pores of each sense. So they are not able to discern one another's objects, for the pores of some are too wide and of others too narrow for the object of sensation, so that some things go right through untouched, and others are unable to enter completely. And he attempts to describe what vision is; and he says that what is in the eye is fire and water and what surrounds it is earth and air, through which light being fine enters, as the light in lanterns. Pores of fire and water are set alternately, and the fire-pores recognize white objects, the water-pores black objects; for the colors harmonize with the pores. And the colors move into vision by means of effluences. And they are not composed alike . . . and some of opposite elements; for some the fire is within and for others it is on the outside, so some animals see better in the daytime and others at night; those that have less fire see better by day, for the light inside them is balanced by the light outside them; and those that have less water see better at night, for what is lacking is made up for them."<sup>4</sup>

Besides discussing the phenomena of vision, Empedocles described the other senses:

"And hearing is the result of noises coming from outside. For when (the air) is set in motion by a sound, there is an echo within . . . and the ear he calls an 'offshoot of flesh': and the air when it is set in motion strikes on something hard and makes an echo. And smell is connected with breathing, so those have the keenest smell whose breath moves most quickly; and the strongest odor arises as an effluence from fine and light bodies. But he makes no careful discrimination with reference to taste and touch separately, either how or by what means they take place, except the general statement that sensation takes place by a fitting into the pores; and pleasure is due to likenesses in the elements and in their mixture, and pain to the opposite."<sup>5</sup>

Empedocles gave a physiological explanation of thought and perception. According to his way of thinking, even the moral and intellectual qualities of mankind are dependent upon *mechanistic* factors:

<sup>4</sup> Theophrastus, *de sens.* 7; *Dox.* 500 (*ibid.*, pp. 142-143).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

"... thought is the same thing as, or something like, sensation. For recounting how we recognize each thing by each, he said at length; Now out of these (elements) all things are fitted together and their form is fixed, and by these men think and feel pleasure and pain. So it is by blood especially that we think; for in this specially are mingled (all) the elements of things. And those in whom equal and like parts have been mixed, not too far apart, nor yet small parts, nor exceeding great, these have the most intelligence and the most accurate senses; and those who approximate to this come next; and those who have the opposite qualities are the most lacking in intelligence. And those in whom the elements are scattered and rarefied, are torpid and easily fatigued; and those in whom the elements are small and thrown close together, move so rapidly and meet with so many things that they accomplish but little by reason of the swiftness of the motion of the blood. And those in whom there is a well-tempered mixture in some one part, are wise at this point; so some are good orators, others good artisans, according as the mixture is in the hands or in the tongue; and the same is true of the other powers."<sup>6</sup>

## RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES OF EMPEDOCLES

Empedocles' religious doctrines were influenced by the Mysteries. He stated that men are outcasts trying to regain the bliss of heaven. Life takes place in "the joyless land, where are murder and wrath and troops of other spirits of evil, and parching plagues and putrefactions and floods roam in darkness through the meadow of Destruction."<sup>7</sup>

He himself thought he had been on various occasions in earlier incarnations a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a fish in the sea. One time he had been an inhabitant of Olympus, but now he was an exile from heaven. Life on earth, then, according to Empedocles, is a pilgrimage:

"There is an Oracle of Destiny, a decree of the gods from of old, eternal, with broad oaths fast sealed: Whensoever one sinfully defiles his own hands with blood, or, following after strife, swears a false oath—even one of those spirits that are heirs of everlasting life, thrice ten thousand seasons shall he wander far from the Blessed,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>7</sup> Frags. 121, 124, Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, p. 73.

being born from time to time in all manner of mortal shapes, passing from one to another of the painful paths of life.

"For the power of the Air drives him seaward; and Sea spews him out upon dry land; Earth casts him into the rays of the blazing Sun, and Sun into the eddying Air. One from another receives him, and he is abhorred of all."<sup>8</sup>

How then can we achieve divinity? How can we be released from reincarnation? Empedocles stressed, above all, purification, abstinence from warfare, and vegetarianism. His doctrine of deity was more refined than that of popular theology in that he believed we cannot attribute any *material* traits to God; rather, we must visualize him as ineffable mind. He thought that the popular gods had only a symbolic meaning. While he did not deny their existence, he regarded them with considerable indifference.

### ATHENIAN CULTURE

With Anaxagoras, whom we shall next consider, the scene of philosophy moves to Athens. He was part of the brilliant revival which we associate with the Periclean Age. Although he was born at Clazomenae, he spent many years in Athens, where he was regarded as an extremely profound philosopher. In this age Phidias beautified the city, the great tragic poets elevated the drama to new heights, and the Sophists stimulated a new interest in education.

The spirit of this Greek enlightenment was well expressed by the funeral oration of Pericles, delivered in 431 B.C. It commemorates those who had died during the first year of the Peloponnesian War. Pericles started out by describing the advantages of democracy.

"We enjoy a form of government which is not in rivalry with the institutions of our neighbors, nay, we ourselves are rather an example to many than imitators of others. By name, since the administration is not in the hands of few but of many, it is called a democracy. And it is true that before the law and in private cases all citizens are on an equality. But in public life every man is advanced to honor according to his reputation for ability,—not because of his party, but because of his excellence. And further, provided he is able to do the city good service, not even in poverty does he find any hindrance, since this cannot obscure men's good opinion of him."<sup>9</sup>

Pericles described the spiritual blessings of Athens and compared them with the stagnation of other city-states:

<sup>8</sup> Frag. 115 (*ibid.*, p. 72).

<sup>9</sup> Thucydides, ii, 37-41 (Webster, *Historical selections*, pp. 155-156).



"Furthermore, we above all men provide ourselves with spiritual refreshment after toil. Regular games and religious festivals fill our year, while the life we lead in private is refined. The daily enjoyment of all these blessings keeps dull care at bay. Because of the greatness of our city, the products of the whole earth stream in upon us, so that we enjoy the rich fruits of other men's labors with as intimate a relish as our own."<sup>10</sup>

This description by Pericles is a rather idealistic version of Athenian democracy. To obtain a correct balance let us take a look at Aristophanes, who had a quick eye for the limitations of popular government. In *The knights* he satirized the mediocre government of Athens and described how frequently it was ruled by the most incapable leaders:

Demosthenes, who is a general of the aristocratic faction, addresses the sausage seller:

"Set these poor wares aside; and now—bow down  
To the ground; and adore the powers of earth and heaven.

S.S. Heigh-day! Why, what do you mean?

Dem. O happy man!

Unconscious of your glorious destiny,  
Now mean and unregarded; but to-morrow,  
The mightiest of the mighty, Lord of Athens.

S.S. Come, master, what's the use of making game?  
Why can't ye let me wash my guts and tripe,  
And sell my sausages in peace and quiet?

Dem. O simple mortal, cast those thoughts aside!  
Bid guts and tripe farewell! Look here! Behold!  
(*pointing to the audience*)

The mighty assembled multitude before ye!

S.S. (*with a grumble of indifference*)  
I see 'em.

Dem. You shall be their lord and master,  
The sovereign and the ruler of them all,  
Of the assemblies and tribunals, fleets and armies;  
You shall trample down the Senate under foot,  
Confound and crush the generals and commanders,  
Arrest, imprison, and confine in irons,  
And feast and fornicate in the Council House."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> *The knights*, 155-167.

[The Sausage Seller wonders if there are any means of making a great man out of him. After all, he is neither well-bred nor well-born.]

*Dem.* "The very means you have, must make ye so.  
Low breeding, vulgar birth, and impudence,  
These, these must make ye, what you're meant to be.

*S.S.* I can't imagine that I'm good for much.

*Dem.* Alas! But why do ye say so? What's the meaning  
Of these misgivings? I discern within ye  
A promise and an inward consciousness  
Of greatness. Tell me truly: are ye allied  
To the families of gentry?

*S.S.* Naugh, not I;  
I'm come from a common ordinary kindred,  
Of the lower order.

*Dem.* What a happiness!  
What a footing will it give ye! What a groundwork  
For confidence and favor at your outset!

*S.S.* But bless ye! only consider my education!  
I can but barely read . . . in a kind of way.

*Dem.* That makes against ye!—the only thing against ye—  
The being able to read, in any way:  
For now no lead nor influence is allowed  
To liberal arts or learned education,  
But to the brutal, base, and underbred.  
Embrace then and hold fast the promises  
Which the oracles of the gods announce to you."<sup>12</sup>

### PHILOSOPHY OF ANAXAGORAS

Perhaps Aristophanes was exaggerating the weakness of the Athenians, but history abounds in examples illustrating the irrationality which prevailed in this center of Greek culture. It is quite certain that the Athenians were conservative in their religious views, as evidenced by their attitude towards Anaxagoras, whom they put on trial for his heretical views.

In one of his treatises Anaxagoras had explained that the sun is not a divinity but a fiery stone. The moon, likewise, he regarded scientifically. As a result he was convicted of atheism and jailed, and it was only through the help of Pericles that he escaped. He spent his

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-194.

last years at Lampsacus, on the shore of the Hellespont, where he was greatly admired and treated as one of the prize possessions of the city.

The persecution of Anaxagoras in Athens was not accidental. Many conservatives hated Pericles and thought him subversive. They disliked the association of Pericles with Aspasia and considered his reforms of the law dangerous to the Athenian government. Hence, we find that not only Anaxagoras but also Phidias, Aspasia, and Pericles himself were all exposed to lawsuits and suffered from the ever-changing moods of the Athenian citizens.

In his cosmology, Anaxagoras asserted that there is no empty space, but unlike Empedocles he did not believe in a definite number of particles; rather, he taught that an *infinite* number of particles or seeds exist. The substances which we perceive are the result of a *mixture* of these particles. These seeds or particles cannot be described adequately by the senses. They are best explained by reason. In his philosophy Mind (*nous*) has an elevated status. It is infinite and completely *pure*:

"In all things there is a portion of everything except mind; and there are things in which there is mind also.

"Other things include a portion of everything, but mind is infinite and self-powerful and mixed with nothing, but it exists alone itself by itself. For if it were not by itself, but were mixed with anything else, it would include parts of all things, if it were mixed with anything; for a portion of everything exists in everything, as has been said by me before, and things mingled with it would prevent it from having power over anything in the same way that it does now that it is alone by itself. For it is the most rarefied of all things and the purest, and it has all knowledge in regard to everything and the greatest power; over all that has life, both greater and less, mind rules. And mind ruled the rotation of the whole, so that it set it in rotation in the beginning. First it began the rotation from a small beginning, then more and more was included in the motion, and yet more will be included. Both the mixed and the separated and distinct, all things mind recognized. And whatever things were to be, and whatever things were, as many as are now, and whatever things shall be, all these mind arranged in order; and it arranged that rotation, according to which now rotate stars and sun and moon and air and ether, now that they are separated. Rotation itself caused the separation, and the dense is separated from the rare, the warm from the cold, the bright from the dark, the dry from the moist. And

there are many portions of many things. Nothing is absolutely separated nor distinct, one thing from another, except mind."<sup>13</sup>

*if you like*  
We must not conceive of the *nous* of Anaxagoras in teleological terms. Both Aristotle and Plato testify to the fact that Anaxagoras interpreted the mind mechanically and described it in corporeal terms. In his cosmology he indicated how the mind starts to set things in motion. This has the following results:

"The dense and the moist and the dark and the cold and all heavy things come together into the midst, and the earth consists of these when they are solidified; but the opposite to these, the warm, the bright, the dry, and the light move out beyond the ether. The earth is flat in form, and keeps its place in the heavens because of its size and because there is no void; and on this account the air by its strength holds up the earth, which rides on the air. And the sea arose from the moisture on the earth, both of the waters which have fallen after being evaporated, and of the rivers that flow down into it. And the rivers get their substance from the clouds and from the waters that are in the earth. For the earth is hollow and has water in the hollow places. And the Nile increases in summer because waters flow down into it from snows at the north."<sup>14</sup>

Anaxagoras explained that the sun and the moon are fiery stones carried around by the revolution of the ether:

". . . And sun and moon and certain other bodies moving with them, but invisible to us, are below the stars. Men do not feel the warmth of the stars, because they are so far away from the earth; and they are not warm in the same way that the sun is, because they are in a colder region. The moon is below the sun and nearer us. The sun is larger than the Peloponnesos. The moon does not have its own light, but light from the sun. The revolution of the stars takes them beneath the earth. The moon is eclipsed when the earth goes in front of it, and sometimes when the bodies beneath the moon go in front of it; and the sun is eclipsed when the new moon goes in front of it."<sup>15</sup>

His views on earthquakes, the nature of winds, and animals were in advance of his time:

"And winds arise when the air is rarefied by the sun, and when objects are set on fire and moving towards the sphere are borne away. Thunders and lightnings arise from heat striking the clouds.

<sup>13</sup> Frags. 5, 6 (Nahm, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151).

<sup>14</sup> Hipp., *Phil.* 8; *Dox.* 561 (*ibid.*, p. 153).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

Earthquakes arise from the air above striking that which is beneath the earth; for when this is set in motion, the earth which rides on it is tossed about by it. And animals arose in the first place from moisture, and afterwards one from another; and males arise when the seed that is separated from the right side becomes attached to the right side of the womb, and females when the opposite is the case."<sup>16</sup>

Notice that he gave a naturalistic account of evolution. Animals are not created by divine decree, said he, nor is man exempt from the mechanistic chain of causation.

In the philosophy of Anaxagoras we find a plurality of worlds. He speculated that other planets are in existence which likewise are inhabited and which contain the elements of civilization. In this view he exhibited again a vast and bold imagination.

In his doctrine of knowledge Anaxagoras contradicted Empedocles. He thought that sensation takes place through opposite qualities:

"... like is not affected by like. And he attempts to enumerate things one by one. For seeing is a reflection in the pupil, and objects are not reflected in the like, but in the opposite. And for many creatures there is a difference of color in the daytime, and for others at night, so that at that time they are sharp-sighted. But in general the night is more of the same color as the eyes. And the reflection takes place in the daytime, since light is the cause of reflection; but that color which prevails the more is reflected in its opposite. In the same manner both touch and taste discern; for what is equally warm or equally cold does not produce warm or cold when it approaches its like, nor yet do men recognize sweet or bitter by these qualities in themselves, but they perceive the cold by the warm, the drinkable water by the salt, the sweet by the bitter, according as each quality is absent; for all things are existing in us. . . . And every sensation is attended with pain, which would seem to follow from the fundamental thesis; for every unlike thing by touching produces distress."<sup>17</sup>

Anaxagoras also applied his metaphysical and epistemological concepts to religion. He did not believe in divination or miracles. He was unorthodox and gave only a symbolic explanation of the gods. Consequently he identified Zeus with *nous*, and Athena with art.

It is interesting to note that Pericles made use of the scientific labor of Anaxagoras. During a battle, an eclipse of the sun took

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>17</sup> Theophr., *de sens.* 27; *Dox.* 507 (*ibid.*, pp. 154-155).

place—an event which frightened his warriors. Using the theory of Anaxagoras, Pericles explained the phenomenon and thus restored order among his military forces.

### SUMMARY

The achievements of Anaxagoras were not inconsiderable. His contributions to mythology, his hypothesis regarding planetary formation, his belief in the evolution of man, all showed his penetrating insight. His principles indicate a fervent struggle between religion and science. Usually the Greeks were tolerant when it came to new scientific discoveries; but when the new theories became too radical, the scientists had to suffer.

What caused the intolerance of the Athenians? One factor, of course, was traditional religion, which had developed an orthodox cosmological scheme. Another factor was politics. The conservatives wanted to return to the good old days and were opposed to any new ways of living and any new ideas. Furthermore, it must be remembered that Anaxagoras was a foreigner, and his concepts were regarded as alien and subversive.

There is an interesting story about Anaxagoras while he was at Lampsacus. Upon hearing that the Athenians had condemned him to death, he remarked that nature had condemned both the Athenians and himself. This was indeed prophetic, for he died a few years later, and Sparta destroyed Athenian power by the end of the Peloponnesian War (404 B.C.).

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the significance of the concept of *nous* in Anaxagoras?
2. Why was Anaxagoras persecuted by the Athenians? Why are modern thinkers usually persecuted?
3. How scientific were Anaxagoras' views?
4. What is the role of love and strife in Empedocles?
5. How did Empedocles describe the process of evolution?
6. What were the sources of Athenian supremacy, according to Pericles?
7. How did Aristophanes satirize Athenian democracy? In your opinion, how would he judge American democracy?
8. What are the four stages of life, according to Empedocles?
9. What were the religious views of Empedocles? Compare them with the religious views of Xenophanes.
10. What, in your opinion, are the main weaknesses of Empedocles' philosophy?

## ATOMISTS AND ECLECTICS

. . . . .

### LEUCIPPUS AND DEMOCRITUS

**L**eucippus, the teacher of Democritus, ranked high among the eminent scientific philosophers of ancient times. He was very much respected by other philosophers, and his views appear to have been advanced for his time; but his works have been lost, and thus we can form no definite ideas regarding his concepts. We do not even know where he was born. According to ancient accounts it could have been Abdera, Elea, Melos, or Miletus.

It is probable that he was a contemporary of Anaxagoras and Empedocles. The loss of his work is extremely unfortunate since, if we wish to restore completely the history of Greek philosophy, our only alternative is to identify the views of Leucippus with those of Democritus, as did the ancient commentators. It appears certain that most of their views were identical.

Democritus is not as indefinite a figure as Leucippus. He was born c. 460 B.C. and lived at Abdera. According to many accounts he reached a ripe old age—ninety years, some say. Many philosophers seem to enjoy longevity, as can be seen by the advanced age reached by Bergson, Santayana, Russell, Dewey, and Whitehead in our own time.

In his boyhood Democritus showed intense interest in philosophy. He could indulge in this pastime because he had a rich father, and he obtained an excellent education through traveling. According to ancient accounts he visited Egypt, where he was absorbed in its religious tradition, and also Persia, Chaldea, Ethiopia, and India. Apparently he visited Athens. This wide experience of travel in foreign lands lends credence to his alleged boasting that he had seen more nations than any other Greek.

At Abdera, Democritus built up a formidable philosophical school. Many students gathered about him, the most promising being Metrodorus of Chios and Anaxarchus of Abdera.

Democritus wrote most prolifically and covered many fields ranging from philosophy to law. He also devoted himself to astronomy, physics, biology, psychology, and ethics. Ancient commentators maintained that his literary productions rivaled those of Aristotle, who covered almost every subject of knowledge. Unfortunately, the main works of Democritus have been lost, and in discussing the Atomic school of philosophy we must rely primarily upon the commentators.

### THE ATOMISTS

The Atomic school ushered in a new scientific period. Democritus and Leucippus, like the preceding philosophers, were interested in the basic world-substance; but their evaluation of it was quite different. Instead of a single basic substance, they spoke of an infinite number of atoms. Since there is no emptiness in them, it is impossible to cut them. They are solid and completely homogeneous.

What makes this theory modern is the Atomists' insistence that motion does not come externally but is *inherent* in the atoms. They discarded the view of Empedocles, who needed two external agents to explain the rotation in the universe. This motion, the Atomists asserted, cannot be destroyed, for it is eternal.

Why do the atoms move? What causes them to swirl about? What is their purpose? No definite answers were forthcoming. The Atomists simply maintained that we must *assume* the fact of motion—an assumption made in modern science, which likewise postulates definite first principles and from these deduces the behavior of natural phenomena.

The fundamental aim of Democritus was not a description of why the universe evolves, but how it can be described and understood. Thus he gave us a *quantitative interpretation* of the world.



The Atomists were progressive in that they asserted positively that empty space exists. The earlier thinkers, especially the Eleatics, had conceived reality as fullness and had denied that emptiness can exist. The void, to them, meant Non-being. Anaxagoras and Empedocles likewise denied the existence of empty space.

The Atomists explained that the fundamental particles move around in empty space and that this motion gives rise to various world systems. Here another problem arises. How is this motion to be conceived? Is it teleological or mechanistic? Does it depend on a divine force, or is it part of the inherent structure of things? The Atomists answered unequivocally: Motion is caused by necessity. In short, the universe must be conceived as a *mechanistic* structure.

The Atomists anticipated the ideal of modern science, which likewise teaches that man's progress lies in a complete understanding of nature. Only by increasing our power over nature, modern science tells us, can we achieve an adequate philosophy and bring about a better civilization.

The Atomists made an important distinction between primary and secondary qualities: Primary qualities, such as density and hardness, are part of the atoms; but secondary qualities, such as color, are only assumptions of our senses. The Atomists denied that the particles can become hard, cold, warm, or dry. By nature nothing is white, black, or yellow, since color exists only by convention, according to Atomic philosophy.

The world scheme of Democritus exhibited a bold imagination. Plutarch tells us:

"Democritus the Abderite supposed the universe to be infinite because it had not been fashioned by any Maker. And again he says it is unchangeable, and in general he states in express terms the kind of universe it is: The causes of what now exists have no beginning, but from infinitely preceding time absolutely everything which was, is, and shall be, has been held down by necessity. But he says the sun and the moon came into existence. They had their own motion without having any heat or light but having, on the contrary, a nature similar to earth. Each of them first came into being by a peculiar change of the cosmos, and later when the circle of the sun was enlarged, fire was included in it."<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, as we are told by Hippolytus, Democritus believed in a plurality of worlds:

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, *Strom.* 7 (D 581), Nahm, *Selections from early Greek philosophy*, pp. 170-171.

" . . . and there are an infinite number of worlds differing in size; in some there is neither sun nor moon, in others they are larger than ours, and in others there are many suns and moons. The distances between the worlds is unequal and in some quarters there are more worlds, in others fewer, and some are growing and others have reached their full size, and others are disintegrating, and in some quarters worlds are coming into being and in others they are ceasing to exist. They are destroyed by colliding with each other. And some worlds are devoid of living beings and all moisture. In our system the earth came into being before the stars, and the moon is nearest the earth, and then the sun, and then the fixed stars. The planets are not equally distant from the earth. The world remains at its maturity until it can no longer receive any [nourishment] from outside."<sup>2</sup>

The astronomical views of the Atomists were less sublime. They thought of the earth as a disk in breadth, and hollow in the middle. In their astronomical theories the influence of Anaximenes was especially prominent.

An interesting account of perception was given by Democritus. He believed that material objects give off images which enter our sense organs:

"These images go to and fro in every direction, springing off implements, clothes, plants, and especially living beings because of their motion and warmth, and they not only have impressed on them the same shape as the bodies . . . but they also assume the appearances of the changes, thoughts, habits, and emotions of each person's soul and so are drawn together. And if with these qualities they strike a person, then like living beings they announce and declare to those who receive them the opinions, arguments, and impulses of those who released them, provided they retain the likenesses articulate and unconfused for impingement. The best results are obtained in calm air, since their motion is then unimpeded and swift. But the air of autumn when the trees shed their leaves is irregular and blustery. Therefore it twists and distorts the images in various ways dimming and weakening their clearness which is obscured by the slowness of their progress, while on the other hand those which dart forth from things warm and fertile and are quickly conveyed, deliver fresh and significant impressions."<sup>3</sup> Occasionally, in this contact between the senses and the external

<sup>2</sup> Hippol., *Refut.* i, 13 (D 565) (*ibid.*, p. 171).

<sup>3</sup> Plut., *Quaest. conv.* viii, 10, 2, p. 734ff. (*ibid.*, pp. 179-180).

world, error occurs which is due to the constitution of the sense organs and to the obstruction of the intervening air.

Despite his materialistic bias, Democritus believed in reason. Perception can give us only probable truth, he said, whereas reason gives us *certainty*. It is a mistake to regard Democritus as a skeptic, for he was very much opposed to the skeptical conclusions which the Sophists upheld.

Democritus explained that occasionally the soul achieves direct contact with the images of the external world, thereby giving a more adequate picture of phenomena, since this contact is not blurred by the intervention of the senses. This connection between the soul atoms and the atomic clusters of phenomena makes divine knowledge possible. Reason, to Democritus, was not a magic capacity; rather, it was to be interpreted in a naturalistic manner.

### ETHICS AND RELIGION

The ethical scheme of Democritus also deserves attention. He began by praising the value of enjoyment and by showing that the pleasure-pain principle is all-important. This, however, does not imply physical hedonism because, according to him, the pleasures of the mind are most significant. The wise man will be independent of his environment: he will not rely on wealth, fame, or social position; rather, he will cultivate restraint and sober understanding, avoiding all excessive desires, for "glory and wealth without wisdom are not safe possessions."

Characteristic of the Democritean moral teachings are the following passages:

"Whoever commits disgraceful deeds should be ashamed first before himself.

"He that contradicts and keeps on talking is unfitted to learn what he should.

"To do all the talking and not be willing to hear anything is greediness.

"One should watch the bad man lest he seize his opportunity.

"The envious man inflicts pain on himself as though he were an enemy.

"The enemy is, not he that injures, but he that wants to.

"The enmity of one's kinfolk is far worse than that of strangers.

"Be not suspicious of everyone, but careful and wary.

"One should accept favors with the expectation of returning them many-fold.

"When conferring a favor, keep your eye on the recipient lest he be a cheat who will requite good with evil.

"Benevolent is, not he that looks to the return, but he that wills to do good."<sup>4</sup>

Democritus taught that it is more important to have regard for the soul than for the body, and to believe in cheerfulness and the avoidance of all envy:

"It is fitting that men have more regard for the soul than the body, for the soul's perfection corrects the viciousness of the body, but the vigor of the body, without reason, does not make the soul a whit better.

"It is best for man to pass his life with as much cheerfulness as possible and with as little distress. And this he would do, did he not find his pleasures in mortal affairs.

"Men attain cheerfulness through moderation in pleasure and equableness of life. Excess and want are ever alternating and causing great disturbances in the soul. Souls that are shifting from extreme to extreme are neither steadfast nor cheerful. You should, therefore, fix your mind upon what is possible and be content with what you have, giving little heed to those who are envied and admired, and not allowing your thoughts to dwell upon them. Rather, you should view the lives of the wretched and think of their suffering so that what you now have and possess may seem great and enviable to you, and that it be not your lot, while craving more, to suffer at heart."<sup>5</sup>

In turning to the religious theories of Democritus, we find an emancipated spirit. He regarded the soul as being of the same constitution as the body. Consciousness, then, depends upon the physical state of the soul. The soul, while more finely polished than the body, is not an autonomous substance, and death scatters the soul among other atoms. Consequently, Democritus did not believe in personal immortality.

"... Democritus affirms the soul to be a sort of fire or heat. For the 'shapes' or atoms are infinite and those which are spherical he declares to be fire and soul. . . . The aggregate of such seeds, he tells us, forms the constituent elements of the whole of nature [and herein he agrees with Leucippus], while those of them which are spherical form the soul, because such figures most easily find their way through everything and, being themselves in motion, set other

<sup>4</sup> *The golden maxims (ibid., p. 214).*

<sup>5</sup> Stobaeus (*ibid.*, pp. 218-219).

things in motion. The Atomists assume that it is the soul which imparts motion to animals. It is for this reason that they make life depend upon respiration. For, when the surrounding air presses upon bodies and tends to extrude those atomic shapes which, because they are never at rest themselves, impart motion to animals, then they are reinforced from outside by the entry of other like atoms in respiration, which in fact, by helping to check compression and solidification, prevent the escape of the atoms already contained in the animals; and life, so they hold, continues so long as there is strength to do this."<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, Democritus offered a simple, naturalistic explanation of the gods:

"Democritus says that the men of old, when they saw what happens in the sky, such as thunder, lightning, thunderbolts, conjunctions of the stars, and eclipses of the sun and moon, were terrified and thought that these things were caused by gods."<sup>7</sup>

Also, he held that "certain phantoms approach men (some of which are productive of good, others of evil. Hence he prays) to meet propitious phantoms. (Although not indestructible these phantoms are hard to destroy and they are great and marvelous for they predict the future experience of men by being both seen and heard. For this reason the ancients seized upon the appearance of these things and considered it a god, as if God whose nature is indestructible were nothing else except these.)"<sup>8</sup>

Democritus believed that the gods give all good things to mankind, but that evil is brought about by men themselves. It is useless, according to his philosophy, to speculate on the hereafter, for there is no certain knowledge regarding the subject.

## HIPPON

With Hippon we enter the eclectic tradition in Greek philosophy, in which originality no longer prevailed. Following Thales, Hippon regarded water as the fundamental principle of the universe. He explained the formation of the world by saying that it was due to fire, which had conquered water. In ancient times he was regarded as subversive in religion and frequently was accused of atheism. Like Democritus, he had a naturalistic tendency in his philosophy.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *On the soul*, 1. ii. 3, Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>7</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *adv. math.* ix, 24 (*ibid.*, p. 140).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ix. 19 (Nahm, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-218).

## CRATYLUS

Cratylus likewise showed little originality in his philosophy. Following the tradition of Heraclitus, he went to extremes in his insistence upon the prevailing flux in the universe. Because he was so imbued with the prevalence of change, he made no positive intellectual assertions whatsoever. He was occupied mainly with the philosophy of language and influenced Plato, whom he instructed in philosophy.

## DIOGENES OF APOLLONIA

Diogenes echoed the views of Anaximenes and returned to the theory of air as the fundamental substance. The changes in the world he attributed to rarefaction and condensation. He did not describe air as a mechanistic substance; rather, he believed it has the power of thought. The air substance, he taught, sustains all life; when it leaves the body, death ensues.

## METRODORUS

Metrodorus was a disciple of Anaxagoras, but he appears to have been more pious than the latter. It will be remembered that Anaxagoras and Xenophanes attacked the popular doctrine of the gods; to this attack Metrodorus replied by giving allegorical accounts of Zeus and by describing the Homeric heroes as divine figures. He believed in the similarity between divine beings and man. Nature, to him, was pregnant with sacred symbolism. He greatly admired Homer's *Iliad* and thought it contains valuable wisdom concerning the nature of the gods.

## ARCHELAUS OF ATHENS

Archelaus was more skeptical than Metrodorus, and in ethics he made a distinction between nature and convention. Thus he anticipated the conclusions of the Sophists.

In his cosmology, he thought that mind and matter have always been mixed. The two principles which produced the world, according to him, are *the warm* and *the cold*. The warm, he thought, is in constant motion while the cold is inert.

His astronomical theory was *geocentric*, affirming that the earth is the center of the universe and was formed by a process of condensation and rarefaction. Man, according to Archelaus, is not the only possessor of mind (*nous*); rather, mind is well distributed

throughout the universe. With Archelaus, philosophy shifted to ethical problems and we take leave of the cosmological school of Greek philosophy.

## THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE COSMOLOGISTS

In summarizing the pre-Socratic period we should note that some of its representatives, such as Democritus, were contemporaries of Socrates and thus chronologically belong to a later period. However, *philosophically* they belong to the cosmological group of thinkers.

The contribution of the cosmological period can best be appreciated by understanding the nature of the problems that were raised. The cosmologists' answers were neither final nor absolute and were overhauled by later philosophers, yet their questions formed a foundation for almost all the subject matter of later ancient philosophy.

(1) When the cosmologists discussed the nature of the world-stuff, an important contribution was made to metaphysics, for metaphysics tries to penetrate beyond the veil of appearance in its quest for reality. We have seen that they conceived of the world-stuff in various ways:

- Thales—Water
- Anaximander—Boundless
- Anaximenes—Air
- Pythagoreans—Unlimited *vs.* Limited  
(reducing all things to  
number)
- Heraclitus—Fire
- Parmenides—Being (spherical—finite)
- Melissus—Being (infinite)
- Empedocles—Earth, Air, Fire, and Water
- Anaxagoras—*Nous*
- Democritus—Atoms
- Hippon—Water
- Diogenes of Apollonia—Air

(2) They raised questions regarding the relationship between Being and change. The Eleatics contended that only Being exists, while Heraclitus said that everything is in a state of flux. They

showed how the universe arose in a scientific way and thus helped emancipate the Greeks from the rule of early religious mythology.

(3) The cosmologists contributed to the foundation of epistemology by their distinction between empirical and rational knowledge. Philosophers like Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus gave exact accounts of the epistemological process. But important differences arose. Empedocles believed that sensation is between like qualities, while Anaxagoras thought it exists between unlike qualities. And the Atomists thought that the atomic clusters issue miniature copies which are absorbed by the senses.

(4) The cosmological period also made a notable beginning in the field of logic. The use of dialectic by Zeno, the paradoxes of the Eleatic school, all indicated that a definite methodology was needed for the philosophic discipline. Thus the mathematical researches of Pythagoras led to greater exactness in the formation of philosophic problems.

(5) The cosmologists stimulated the development and progress of the natural and physical sciences. Astronomy, mathematics, biology, physiology, medicine, geology—all were aided by these thinkers who mainly gave a *mechanistic* rather than a teleological explanation of phenomena.

(6) Religiously, important advances were made. Xenophanes exposed the fallacy of anthropomorphism. The doctrine of reincarnation was held with fervor by the Pythagoreans and Empedocles, while Anaxagoras came into conflict with the religious tradition of Athens. Unlike Christian philosophers, the cosmologists had little interest in personal immortality, and they did not regard man as a privileged creature in the universe.

(7) The cosmologists raised the problem of the soul, which was bound to have repercussions in Plato and Aristotle. Democritus said that the soul is not qualitatively distinct from the body and that it has an atomic constitution. This view was rejected by Plato, who believed in the supremacy of the soul and in its distinct separateness from the body.

(8) To the science of ethics the cosmologists added new concepts. These concepts were advanced especially by Democritus, who believed in the pleasures of the mind and stressed the virtue of cheerfulness.

At the end of the cosmological period man became an important problem, and attention was turned away from the universe to man's needs, desires, and ideals. The problem of society appeared. What



is the function of the philosopher in society? Should he be democratic, as Empedocles was, or should he regard himself as a superman, as Heraclitus did? Can society be saved by the work of the philosophers, or is society beyond redemption? The attack against the prevalent institutions was especially sharp in the philosophy of Heraclitus, who viewed his contemporaries with vast contempt.

(9) Finally, a beginning was made in esthetics. Poets, like Homer and Hesiod, were condemned by Heraclitus and Xenophanes, who believed in a more moral concept of literary endeavor than these two poets showed. The science of harmonics was founded by the Pythagoreans, who conceived of music as the key to reality and who also realized that art has an important moral function.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the significance of the Atomic theory?
2. Compare and contrast Democritus with Parmenides.
3. Evaluate the ethical ideals of Democritus.
4. How did Democritus explain the process of knowledge?
5. What was Democritus' attitude toward religion?
6. Compare the Greek view of atoms with the modern atomic theory.
7. What are the weaknesses of Democritus' world-view?
8. Evaluate the contribution of the eclectics.
9. Summarize the main problems of pre-Socratic philosophy.
10. What pre-Socratic thinker do you regard as most significant? Why?

## THE SOPHISTS

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### THE ENVIRONMENT

**T**he Sophists of the 5th century B.C. represent a new stage in Greek philosophy. They arose in a period almost comparable with the Enlightenment of the 18th century. As during the Enlightenment, the main interests of society were secular and realistic, and there was an almost universal reaction against the superstitions and darkness of the past.

The 5th century in Athens marked the rise of a rich merchant class, and thus there was more leisure to speculate than in earlier times. A different type of education arose, which, independent of the ancient traditions, included the new sciences as well as rhetoric. The opulent merchants and aristocrats wanted their sons to have the best education. Willing to pay a high price for this privilege, they turned to the Sophists, whose fame was established throughout Greece.

The 5th century was an age of political instability, with great conflict between aristocracy and democracy. Pericles ruled with wisdom and foresight, trying to unite the warring factions; but fol-

lowing his death, the conflict between democracy and oligarchy became more pronounced. In times of stress, the masses frequently turned to the demagogues and, on other occasions, to opportunists like Alcibiades.

The balance of power shifted. At the beginning of the century, the Persian danger had given the Greeks a sense of unity, for they realized that they had to unite if they were to remain independent. The victories over the Persians at Marathon and at Salamis were celebrated as a triumph of the Greeks over the barbarians. However, victory proved to be indecisive and caused immense discontent. Athens became progressively more imperialistic and began to use power politics in its relations with the other city-states. This is well described by Thucydides in his account of the Athenian expedition against Melos:

"The Melians are colonists of the Lacedaemonians, who would not submit to Athens like the other islanders. At first they were neutral and took no part. But when the Athenians tried to coerce them by ravaging their lands, they were driven into open hostilities. The generals encamped with the Athenian forces on the island. But before they did the country any harm they sent envoys to negotiate with the Melians. Instead of bringing these envoys before the people, the Melians desired them to explain their errand to the magistrates and to the chief men."<sup>1</sup>

The Athenians explained that they would not use fine words since they realized, in the discussion of human affairs, the question of justice "enters only between equals, and the powerful exact what they can."

The Melians believed that if they put up a fight, they would still have a chance, since wars are not always determined by superior numbers.

The Athenians replied: "Hope is a good comforter in the hour of danger, and when men have something else to depend upon, although hurtful, she is not ruinous. But when her spendthrift nature has induced them to stake their all, they see her as she is in the moment of their fall, and not till then. While the knowledge of her might enable them to beware of her, she never fails. You are weak, and a single turn of the scale might be your ruin. Do not you be thus deluded; avoid the error of which so many are guilty, who, although they might still be saved if they would take the natural

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, v. 84 (abridged), Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, p. 143.

means, when visible grounds of confidence forsake them, have recourse to the invisible, to prophecies and oracles and the like, which ruin men by the hopes which they inspire in them.”<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the Melians appealed to the favor of heaven, because:

“... we are righteous, and you against whom we contend are unrighteous; and we are satisfied that our deficiency in power will be compensated by the aid of our allies the Lacedaemonians; they cannot refuse to help us, if only because we are their kinsmen, and for the sake of their own honor. And therefore our confidence is not so utterly blind as you suppose.

*Athenians:* As for the gods, we expect to have quite as much of their favor as you: for we are not doing or claiming anything which goes beyond common opinion about divine or men's desires about human things. For of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a law of their nature wherever they can rule they will. This law was not made by us, and we are not the first who have acted upon it; we did but inherit, and shall bequeath it to all time, and we know that you and all mankind, if you were as strong as we are, would do as we do.”<sup>3</sup>

The Melians refused to surrender, but their resistance proved to be in vain, for treachery prevailed among the citizens. When the Athenians conquered the Melians, they killed all the men of military age and sold the women and children into slavery. This is an example of power politics which reminds us of our own period. Is it surprising that some Sophists distrusted empty moralization and accepted the standard that “might makes right”? Power politics, however, did not prove to be a complete boon to the Athenians, who experienced a humiliating defeat by the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War, which lasted from 431 to 404 B.C.

The balance of power was constantly shifting; no nation could be completely secure. The more powerful a nation became, the more arrogant were its dealings with its neighbors. Far-sighted thinkers spoke of a Pan-Hellenic Union, but this proved to be an empty dream, for hatred prevailed among the individual city-states.

A more positive result of this incessant conflict was the contact of Athens with new ideas. New concepts of philosophy, brought in by visitors, were especially noticeable in the philosophies of Protagoras and Anaxagoras, both of whom were not regarded with

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

favor by the conservatives. Still, their influence was widely spread and had a powerful impact on the development of Athenian philosophy.

### THE STATUS OF THE SOPHISTS

Traditionally, the Sophists have been regarded with disfavor by philosophers. This attitude is mainly due to the sharp attacks leveled against them by Plato and Socrates. With the name itself, there arises in our mind the connotation of trickery, hypocrisy, and profound cynicism. We are led to believe that they degraded education and philosophy; that they were men who sold their wisdom for material gain; and that they were ready to help any side regardless of the justice of its arguments. Some of us view them as charlatans who merely popularized ideas without showing any originality. No wonder that many philosophers devoted much time to attacking the Sophist way of life!

However, these views are extremely one-sided and quite unjustified. Actually, the Sophists represented many *divergent* viewpoints. Some believed in complete ethical relativity, while others thought morals had a more sublime meaning. Some, like Callicles, preached a Machiavellian doctrine—that might makes right; others, like Hippias, upheld a belief in absolute justice. We find them not only bold innovators but also supporters of the established way of life. In short, no generalization of the Sophists is possible.

One reason why they were so bitterly attacked by ancient philosophers was their incredible popularity. A Sophist coming to Athens was received with acclaim; admiring disciples gathered around him and regarded his words as infallible and divine. It became quite fashionable to listen to the teachings of Protagoras and Gorgias, and what they said was debated assiduously by the educated classes of Athens. The stir caused by the Sophists in Athens is comparable to the reverberations made by the Existentialists in 20th-century France.

Some philosophers attacked the Sophists because they accepted money for their teachings. Ancient philosophers, like Plato, who had private means of their own, regarded money payment as a degradation of philosophy. Such a view should not deceive us. Many of the Sophists came from a lower economic class, and hence the money they received was necessary for their livelihood. Some thinkers will say that philosophy is to be loved for its own sake and not for any material gain. This sounds better in theory than in practice.

We find in history that philosophy has flourished most when prosperity prevailed; for example, in 5th-century Athens, 16th-century Italy, and 18th-century France. On the other hand, periods of poverty have done very little for the development and stimulation of philosophy.

The Sophists were not callous materialists who sold ideas as a merchant sells goods. The most prominent of them, like Protagoras, had a high concept of the nature and function of philosophy and a strong faith in the moral capacities of man.

### CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SOPHISTS

The Sophists were interested, above all, in the science of rhetoric and thereby stimulated the development of Athenian law. Previously the law courts had been poorly organized, and litigants pleaded their own cases. Now they hired experts. Rhetoric, to the Sophists, not merely involved the study of speech; it also necessitated a knowledge of literature, grammar, and even logic. The art of rhetoric was refined by the Sophists, who realized that in an argument reason very seldom prevails. They taught the orators to manipulate the emotions of their listeners, to appeal to their biases, to win sympathy, and to sway the judges.

In education, the Sophists popularized new scientific ideas. They introduced the physical sciences, especially astronomy and mathematics, into the Athenian curriculum. They gave lectures on the poets, whose works they interpreted not only from the standpoint of grammar but also from the viewpoint of esthetics and morality. By their arguments they stimulated a more insistent concern with logic. Much of the best work of Plato and Aristotle was done in opposition to the logical theory of the Sophists.

The Sophists' services to social philosophy should not be underestimated. Previously, social institutions had been regarded with indifference by most philosophers. Now the problem of democracy, totalitarianism, and tyranny became increasingly significant in philosophical disputes. Politics was no longer an amateur sport open to all. The Sophists saw to it that many politicians received special training, which, however, was not always for the best interests of the masses.

In general, the Sophists reversed the emphasis of philosophy. Previous to them it had been on the universe; now it was on *man*. Thus they stimulated ethics. They tore down many of the cherished beliefs of the Greeks, it is true, and they were more destructive than

creative. Still, they promoted vigorous discussion and frequently a healthy skepticism regarding the existence of absolute ethical ideals.

Unlike the cosmologists, the Sophists made no attempt to explain the fundamental nature of the universe. They were not interested in the basic world-stuff. They felt that their predecessors had been naive in occupying themselves with such abstruse problems, for their own interests were empirical and down-to-earth. In their outlook on life they were *pragmatic*, concerned with consequences and with functional results rather than with absolute maxims and absolute standards.

This outlook created skepticism, not only in metaphysics but also in religion, morals, and ethics. The attitude of the Sophists did not long prevail, for Socrates again emphasized absolute laws and gave a more moralistic interpretation of life.

### PROTAGORAS

The outstanding Sophist was Protagoras, who came from Abdera, the native city of Democritus. We are not certain about the exact dates of his life, although we do know that he lived in the 5th century B.C. In his youth he was a porter and received no formal education, but he was so eager for knowledge that he taught himself to read and write. He traveled a great deal, and wherever he went he was received as a master of knowledge. In Athens he won the friendship of Pericles and accumulated a fortune through the high fees which he charged for teaching.

There is a story that Protagoras was accused of impiety because of his religious views and that he was condemned by an Athenian court. He preferred exile, it is said, but some historians have challenged this account and state that he never suffered the enmity of the Athenians.

Only a few fragments of his works remain. One of them concerns religion and is entitled *On the gods*. It asserts that we cannot know definitely what the gods are like. "We are hindered in our knowledge by the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life." What does this imply? First of all, a denial of popular theology. Protagoras, like Xenophanes, did not accept the common concept of the gods, and he was not a proponent of fanaticism in religion. The attitude which he advocated was suspension of judgment.

This attitude, however, does not imply complete atheism but, rather, agnosticism. We have an impression of Protagoras as a man who conformed outwardly to the ritual but inwardly was indifferent

to religion. Thus he reminds us of the 18th-century philosophers of France. They, too, regarded religion with indifference; they, too, were humanists and interested in man rather than in supernatural matters.

Another statement of Protagoras, that man is the measure of all things, expresses fully his humanism. The question arises as to whether he meant the individual or mankind. No definite answer is forthcoming. Apparently he believed that truth is purely private and changing; consequently, there can be no absolute standards in ethics, metaphysics, or religion. The standard of truth is what works for the individual and what satisfies him. This standard allows no ground for coercion; no one can force an individual to believe in certain dogmas. In this manner he fought for freedom of thought.

Like other Sophists, Protagoras was very much interested in education. Like John Dewey, he held that education should start in early youth. Progressive in his concept of punishment, he did not think it should be used as a means of vengeance but as a tool for improvement.

His skepticism was also apparent in his concept of mathematics. The theorems of geometry, he claimed, do not have absolute validity. Like Hume, he thought they apply only to an *ideal* realm.

As a humanist, Protagoras felt that man could be perfected and that he is distinguished from animals by his mental powers. The task of education, he held, is to cultivate man's intellectual capacities. Traditionalism he abhorred in every form, for he thought that all institutions change and are in an unending state of flux. The political and moral systems of mankind, Protagoras taught, were not invented by the gods but can be explained naturalistically as the products of civilization.

## GORGIAS

Gorgias came to Athens in 427 B.C., when he was sent to plead the cause of his native city, Leontini. He spent many years in Athens, where he became famous and gathered around himself many disciples. His ideal was to unify Greece and to spread the gospel of Pan-Hellenism, for he thought the Greek states were dissipating their energies by internal wars. In his youth he occupied himself with natural science but later turned away from it and concentrated on the problem of man.

Gorgias' conclusions were skeptical. Three of his propositions have come down to us: First, he asserted, *nothing exists*, meaning



thereby that there is no reality. Had not Zeno pointed out that thought inevitably arrives at paradoxes? Must we not think of reality as both one and many, finite and infinite, created and uncreated? Since contradictions cannot be accepted, Gorgias thought it better to assert that reality does not exist.

His second proposition was: If anything exists, it cannot be known. Here again he turned to the previous philosophers, who already had indicated that the senses are not reliable and are a source of illusion. But reason, according to Gorgias, is just as untrustworthy and cannot give us a key to the cosmic stuff, for we are caught by the subjective dilemma. We reason from our own desires, ideals, and wants, which we apply to objective phenomena. This process, however, does not establish truth.

Gorgias' third proposition was: Even if reality could be known, such knowledge cannot be shared and communicated to others. In this assertion, he raised the problem of language. Modern semantics tells us that words do not have an absolute meaning but are purely relative. Gorgias anticipated this conclusion, for he thought every word has a *different* meaning to each individual. For example, my concept of goodness is different from that of a Japanese or a Chinese. When I have a sensation of love it is purely subjective, and it is quite different from the sensation of love felt by a different individual. Words, thus, never fully convey human emotions and ideals.

### HIPPIAS

Among the Sophists Hippias had the most encyclopedic knowledge, which included the sciences, literature, rhetoric, and history. His classroom was the market place and, like Socrates, he was indefatigable in asking questions. Ethically, he believed in inner self-sufficiency and taught that man should be independent of external things.

Hippias' views were generally far-advanced for his time. He looked beyond the city-state to the universe, for he realized that all men have common desires and common aspirations. In many ways he was a world citizen with no fatherland of his own.

### PRODICUS

Prodicus exemplified the skeptical strain of the Sophists. He was not interested in popular religion, and he thought prayer to the gods utterly superfluous. For these views he was regarded with suspicion by the Athenian authorities.

Around him Prodicus saw the enervating influence of luxury. Consequently he taught young people to shun pleasure and to search for a *heroic* way of life. Materialistic values, according to him, are extremely inadequate. The best way of life is one in which man becomes emancipated from a reliance on external goods and attempts to realize his creative, intellectual capacities.

### THRASYMACHUS

Thrasymachus, who is pictured vividly in Plato's *Republic*, appears as a prototype of Machiavelli. He believed that justice can only exist when might supports it, and he advocated that the world be ruled by the strong. Emancipated religiously, he did not accept the concept of Providence or the belief in divine powers.

It may be asked, Did Thrasymachus accept any absolute moral principles? The answer is in the negative, for Thrasymachus thought morality purely conventional. Thus a clever statesman would know how to be immoral, while the masses would follow conventional ideals.

### CALLICLES

Callicles was less extreme in his views than Thrasymachus, although he also opposed the conventional views of morality. To some extent his views remind us of Nietzsche. He stressed the fact that most laws had been designed by the weak, thereby thwarting true greatness in politics. He appealed to a new type of leader who would remold mankind and not be held back by moral scruples.

Callicles regarded nature as an aristocratic force which aids the strong and limits the weak. The moralist, he held, must take nature as his guide, shunning all hypocrisy and sentimentality.

### ALCIDAMAS

Alcidamas arrived at conclusions opposite to those of Callicles. Kingship, itself, is an evil, he asserted, and the state is an agency for oppression. Like Rousseau, he taught that man in nature is free, but that society has enchained him. He demanded the abolition of slavery, a step which was regarded as extremely audacious in the 5th century B.C. Almost communistic, he believed in a natural law which makes all men equal and negates all class barriers.

### ANTIPHON

Antiphon continued the same strain of radical thinking. There can be no distinction, he declared, between the citizen and the foreigner,

and the best attitude is one of internationalism. The gods he regarded from a rationalistic standpoint; thus, he believed that real progress can only come about through education, not through religion.

Antiphon developed a social-contract theory in politics. The state, he taught, represents a contract between the ruler and the subjects. Such a contract does not imply that the ruler has all the power, for there are natural laws of justice and equality. Like Alcidas, he negated the barriers of race and nationality and looked forward to the establishment of a Pan-Hellenic Union.

### INFLUENCE OF THE SOPHISTS

The influence of the Sophists was not merely felt in philosophy but extended to literature and historical writings. Greek historians like Herodotus and Thucydides felt the impact of the movement, especially Thucydides, who gave a scientific account of history and was conscious of the importance of *power* in human affairs. Sophism influenced to some extent the dramas of Sophocles; but it had an even more important impact on Euripides, who frequently challenged the existence of the gods. In *Hippolytus*, for example, he wrote that man can not know anything for certain about the nature of the gods:

*"Chorus.* Surely the thought of the gods, when it comes over my mind, lifts the burden of sorrows; but while I hope in the darkness for some understanding, I faint and fail, when I compare the deeds of men with their fortunes. All is change, to and fro; the life of men shifts in endless wandering.

*"Nurse.* The life of man is all suffering, and there is no rest from pain and trouble. There may be something better than this life; but whatever it be, it is hidden in mists of darkness. So we are sick of love for this life on earth and any gleam it shows, because we know nothing of another. What lies beyond is not revealed, and we drift on a sea of idle tales."<sup>4</sup>

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOPHISTS

As can be seen, the Sophists invigorated the spirit of philosophy. They made philosophic disputes more realistic and more functional. They taught a lesson, not only to Greece but to succeeding ages: the fundamental problem of thinking is not nature but *man*. In them the spirit of humanism was triumphant. They did not pretend to know the final answers in ethics, religion, or metaphysics.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Cornford, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

The Sophists prominently raised the problem of social ethics. The questions they asked relating to the value of social institutions, laws, and progress were repeated by succeeding philosophers. Certainly it must be acknowledged that the Sophists made philosophy an exciting and sparkling occupation. They enriched the educational curriculum of Athens and intensified an interest in rhetoric. As brilliant teachers they made knowledge more practical and more concrete.

The questions they asked are still being asked today. We, too, discuss the relativity of moral standards, and we, too, debate the problem of ends vs. means in ethics. In the Sophists we find the seeds of many modern philosophical movements, such as utilitarianism, pragmatism, positivism, and existentialism.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the social circumstances which produced the Sophist philosophy?
2. Why have the Sophists been misunderstood?
3. Describe the ethical views of the Sophists.
4. Discuss the statement of Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things."
5. Explain the skepticism of Gorgias.
6. In what ways did Thrasymachus reflect the doctrines of totalitarianism?
7. Evaluate the contributions of Callicles.
8. How did the Sophists change the Athenian educational curriculum?
9. How did the Sophists view religion? Do you agree with their attitude? Explain.
10. What were the weaknesses of the Sophist view of life?
11. Why did the Sophists neglect cosmological problems?
12. In what ways were the Sophists radical? In what ways were they conservative?

## SOCRATES

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### THE TIME OF SOCRATES

**T**he life span of Socrates, c. 470-399 B.C., embraced the rise and fall of the Athenian empire. His last years were marred by the fall of Athens and by the ravages of the oligarchic and democratic factions. Around him old foundations were crumbling, with naked power replacing justice and with the political rulers becoming more arrogant than ever.

Athenian youth, in this period, was guided by the doctrines of moral relativism. This skepticism made it distrust tradition and any faith in absolutes. Socrates, however, believed in definite and categorical moral standards and thought that it was the task of philosophy to resurrect a stable social order based on rational ideas and expert knowledge. Living in dark times, he experienced, in 429, the plague of Athens, during which thousands died. The disease, which was explained as an act of divine vengeance, caused the death of Pericles, the leading light of the Athenian state.

Between 421 and 416, an uneasy truce governed the relations of Athens and Sparta. This period witnessed the rise of Alcibiades, one of the disciples of Socrates. Shiftless, unscrupulous, and interested

only in his own welfare, Alcibiades was one of the main factors in the downfall of Athens. He was responsible for the Sicilian expedition which failed in 413 B.C., when the Athenians were defeated at Syracuse.

Several of the city-states rebelled against the Athenian overlordship. This revolt marked the beginning of the end for Athens. Eight years later the Spartans, under their great commander Lysander, destroyed the Athenian fleet. In 404 B.C. the Peloponnesian War ended, with Athens becoming the subject of Sparta. Between 404 and 403 the oligarchic party was supreme in Athens; the Thirty Tyrants ruled with an iron hand and used terroristic methods. In 403 B.C. democracy was finally restored, but it was not a government by the wise and most excellent citizens. Under its sponsorship, in 399 B.C., Socrates was accused of two charges: corrupting the youth and denying the gods of the state.

### VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF SOCRATES

Socrates remains one of the most controversial figures in philosophy. We do not know his exact teachings, since he did not leave any books at his death. We must rely mainly on the accounts of Plato and Xenophon. To Plato, Socrates was the ideal philosopher engaged in a tireless quest for wisdom and able to inspire his disciples with a lofty view of human life. Idealizing Socrates, Plato used him as the narrator for his most profound ethical and metaphysical teachings.

Xenophon, on the other hand, gave a very religious interpretation of Socrates:

"... What evidence did they produce that Socrates refused to recognize the gods acknowledged by the state? Was it that he did not sacrifice? or that he dispensed with divination? On the contrary, he was often to be seen engaged in sacrifice, at home or at the common altars of the state. Nor was his dependence on divination less manifest. Indeed that saying of his, 'A divinity gives me a sign,' was on everybody's lips."<sup>1</sup>

Xenophon told of Socrates' reliance on God:

"... Socrates suited his language to his conviction. Further he would constantly advise his associates to do this, or beware of doing that, upon the authority of this same divine voice; and, as a matter

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, *Recollections of Socrates*, i. 1, Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, p. 175.

of fact, those who listened to his warnings prospered, whilst he who turned a deaf ear to them repented afterwards. Yet, it will be readily conceded, he would hardly desire to present himself to his everyday companions in the character of either knave or fool. Whereas he would have appeared to be both, supposing the God-given revelations had but revealed his own proneness to deception. It is plain he would not have ventured on forecast at all, but for his belief that the words he spoke would in fact be verified. Then on whom, or what, was the assurance rooted, if not upon God? And if he had faith in the gods, how could he fail to recognize them?"<sup>2</sup>

Xenophon asserted that Socrates was not at all interested in science. Thus there could be no doubt about his pious nature:

"No one ever heard him say, or saw him do, anything impious or irreverent. Indeed, in contrast to others he set his face against all discussion of such high matters as the nature of the universe; how the 'kosmos,' as the *savants* [lit., 'the sophists'] phrase it, came into being; or by what forces the celestial phenomena arise. To trouble one's brain about such matters was, he argued, to play the fool."<sup>3</sup>

Aristophanes gave us still another picture of Socrates. To be sure, it was a caricature, since it pictured him as one of the Sophists. In Aristophanes' *The clouds*, we find Socrates in a dialogue with Strepsiades, a peasant, married to an aristocratic lady, who wanted to send his son to Socrates' school. He is admitted to the house and finds Socrates suspended in a basket:

"*Strep:* O, first of all, please tell me what you are doing.

*Soc:* I walk on air, and contemplate the sun.

*Strep:* O then from a basket, you contemplate the gods,  
And not from the earth, at any rate?

*Soc:* Most true.

I could not have searched out celestial matters

Without suspending judgment, and infusing

My subtle spirit with the kindred air.

If from the ground I were to seek these things,

I could not find: so surely does the earth

Draw to herself the essence of our thought.

The same too is the case with water-cress.

*Strep:* Hillo! what's that?

Thought draws the essence into water-cress?

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

Come down, sweet Socrates, more near my level,  
And teach the lessons which I come to learn.

*Soc:* And wherefore art thou come?

*Strep:* To learn to speak.

For owing to my horrid debts and duns,  
My goods are seized, I'm robbed and mobbed, and  
plundered.

*Soc:* How did you get involved with your eyes open?

*Strep:* A galloping consumption seized my money.  
Come now; do let me learn the unjust logic  
That can shirk debts; now do just let me learn it.  
Name your own price, by all the gods I'll pay it.

*Soc:* The gods! Why, you must know the gods with us  
Don't pass for current coin."<sup>4</sup>

All in all, Socrates cuts a rather ridiculous figure in *The clouds*. He is pictured as a radical moralist who denies the traditional religious truths and is a corrupter of Athenian youth.

The Humanists in the Renaissance, however, had the opposite view of this philosopher. To them Socrates was a saint, a veritable Christian in his faith and virtue. They thought the ideal scholar would inevitably be Socratic.

Kierkegaard, the father of modern Existentialism, likewise greatly admired Socrates, whom he used as his model philosopher. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of Socrates. To Kierkegaard, Socrates had profound meaning because of Socrates' constant fight against the Sophists of all time. He stressed the fact that most of the 19th-century philosophers, especially Hegel, were essentially Sophists in their beliefs. Kierkegaard appreciated the method of Socrates and, from him, adopted the motto "Know thyself" as the starting point of philosophy.

Nietzsche, likewise, had much to say about Socrates, but he was less complimentary than Kierkegaard. He favored the pre-Socratics, who, he thought, exhibited real strength and real impartiality and were the supermen of philosophy. In attacking Socrates, Nietzsche felt that he was fighting against impulses in his own nature. Decadence, to Nietzsche, meant faith in morality and in absolute standards instead of guidance by natural instincts.

Bertrand Russell, in his *History of western philosophy*, pictures Socrates almost as a Victorian with a definite faith in immortality.

<sup>4</sup> Aristophanes, *The clouds*, 224-248.



He points to the puritanism of Socrates' beliefs and the preoccupation with the *demon*, the religious voice inside.

John Burnet stressed the fact that Socrates had many metaphysical interests and was responsible for the doctrine of the Ideas as taught by Plato. Socrates, Burnet claimed, was not a moralist primarily but had cosmological interests and hence his philosophy cannot be understood without this metaphysical background.

### CHARACTER AND LIFE

We find Socrates as a loyal citizen of Athens, taking part in several military campaigns and distinguishing himself by his courage. He was given, occasionally, to Spartan sacrifices. We are told that he went barefoot and was also subject to mystical trances. Never cowardly, he was ready to defy the democratic faction as well as the Thirty Tyrants. He risked his life when, as a responsible officer, he refused to agree to the trial of the Athenian generals after the battle of Arginusae. Although he had many friends among the Thirty Tyrants, he believed in the supremacy of the law; and when they issued an illegal order, he refused to carry it out.

Socrates was intensely human; perhaps his marriage contributed to this attitude. Certainly he was not a scholar who preferred isolation, for we find him disputing in the market place and attending many banquets. His conversation was always sparkling and witty. There was a strain of Stoicism in his character, too, for he never lost his dignity, not even during the last days of his life. During the entire trial he retained his composure. Unlike others who had been accused, he did not ask favors.

Excepting his trial, there are not many climactic events in the life of Socrates. His father was a sculptor, and his mother a midwife; at first he thought he would follow in the footsteps of his father, but he changed his mind and turned to philosophy, which he regarded as the most important subject of education.

To some extent he was connected with the Orphic Mysteries, traces of which appear in his religious teachings. When he was thirty-five, the oracle at Delphi declared him to be the wisest man of Athens. In the *Apology* there is an explanation of what the oracle meant. Socrates was perplexed:

"... When I heard the answer, I said to myself, What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of his riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What then can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god, and cannot

lie; that would be against his nature. After long consideration, I thought of a method of trying the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, 'Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest.' Accordingly, I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed him—his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination—and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself; and thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me."<sup>5</sup>

Socrates went to another man and again provoked enmity: "And I lamented and feared this: but necessity was laid upon me,—the word of God, I thought, ought to be considered first. And I said to myself, Go I must to all who appear to know, and find out the meaning of the oracle. And I swear to you, Athenians, by the dog I swear!—for I must tell you the truth—the result of my mission was just this: I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that others less esteemed were really wiser and better."<sup>6</sup>

Socrates explained what real wisdom means. It is a mission to spread real knowledge and real enlightenment: "This inquisition has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies. And I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make enquiry into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 21 (Jowett translation, abridged).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god."<sup>7</sup>

Why was Socrates hated so widely? The Athenians still remembered his association with Alcibiades and his friendship with the tyrants. Some whispered that he was responsible for the mutilation of the statues of Hermes. And, according to rumor, he taught strange religious doctrines. Moreover, his educational procedure was so radical that he was regarded as a subversive professor. Then, too, after the Peloponnesian War there was very little tolerance in Athens. The political leaders were seeking a scapegoat, and Socrates was only too conveniently at hand. Hence he was condemned to take the hemlock.

### THE DEATH OF SOCRATES

The execution of Socrates was delayed for a month. Throughout, he remained faithful to philosophy and in the final hours of his life held a discourse on immortality:

"It was the hour of the sunset. The jailer entered and stood by him, saying:—To you, Socrates, whom I know to be the noblest and gentlest and best of all who ever came to this place, I will not impute the angry feelings of other men, who rage and swear at me, when, in obedience to the authorities, I bid them drink the poison—indeed, I am sure that you will not be angry with me; for others, as you are aware, and not I, are to blame. And so fare you well, and try to bear lightly what must needs be—you know my errand. Then bursting into tears he turned away and went out.

"Socrates looked at him and said: I return your good wishes, and will do as you bid. Then turning to us, he said, How charming the man is: since I have been in prison he has always been coming to see me, and at times he would talk to me, and was as good to me as could be, and now see how generously he sorrows on my account. We must do as he says, Crito; and therefore let the cup be brought, if the poison is prepared: if not, let the attendant prepare some."<sup>8</sup>

Crito, a disciple of Socrates, wanted him to wait a while. Why should he not take the hemlock later? Why should he not enjoy himself before passing on to another world? Socrates replied:

"Yes, Crito, and they of whom you speak are right in so acting, for they think that they will be gainers by the delay; but I am right in not following their example, for I do not think that I should gain

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, *Phaedo*, 116.

anything by drinking the poison a little later; I should only be ridiculous in my own eyes for sparing and saving a life which is already forfeit. . . .

"Crito made a sign to the servant, who was standing by; and he went out, and having been absent for some time returned with the jailer carrying the cup of poison. Socrates said: You, my good friend, who are experienced in these matters, shall give me directions how I am to proceed. The man answered: You have only to walk about until your legs are heavy, and then to lie down, and the poison will act. At the same time he handed the cup to Socrates, who in the easiest and gentlest manner, without the least fear or change of color or feature, looking at the man with all his eyes, Echecrates, as his manner was, took the cup and said: What do you say about making a libation out of this cup to any god? May I, or not? The man answered: We only prepare, Socrates, just so much as we deem enough. I understand, he said: but I may and must ask the gods to prosper my journey from this to the other world."<sup>9</sup>

As Socrates drank the cup the disciples could scarcely restrain themselves:

"And hitherto most of us had been able to control our sorrow; but now when we saw him drinking, and saw too that he had finished the draught, we could no longer forbear, and in spite of myself my own tears were flowing fast; so that I covered my face and wept, not for him, but at the thought of my own calamity in having to part from such a friend. Nor was I the first; for Crito, when he found himself unable to restrain his tears, had got up, and I followed; and at that moment, Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time, broke out in a loud and passionate cry which made cowards of us all. Socrates alone retained his calmness: What is this strange out-cry? he said. I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not misbehave in this way, for I have been told that a man should die in peace. Be quiet, then, and have patience. When we heard his words we were ashamed, and refrained our tears; and he walked about until, as he said, his legs began to fail, and then he lay on his back, according to the directions, and the man who gave him the poison now and then looked at his feet and legs; and after a while he pressed his foot hard, and asked him if he could feel; and he said, No; and then his leg, and so upwards and upwards, and showed us that he was cold and stiff. And he felt them himself, and said: When the poison reaches the heart, that will be the end. He was beginning

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

to grow cold about the groin, when he uncovered his face, for he had covered himself up, and said—they were his last words—he said: Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt? The debt shall be paid, said Crito; is there anything else? There was no answer to this question; but in a minute or two a movement was heard, and the attendants uncovered him; his eyes were set, and Crito closed his eyes and mouth.

"Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend; concerning whom I may truly say, that of all the men of his time whom I have known, he was the wisest and justest and best."<sup>10</sup>

### THE BELIEFS OF SOCRATES

In his philosophical theories Socrates began with an intense opposition to the Sophists. They had maintained that all standards are relative; that virtue is not innate but dependent upon the social institutions. Their skepticism had challenged the prevailing rationalism of the Greek mind.

Socrates, opposing the Sophists, stressed the fact that virtue is *innate*, and that man is endowed with certain moral principles. Ethics, according to him, is not a relative subject but one which can be taught scientifically. The task of the moralist is to develop the potentialities of man, to create clarity of perception and depth of insight.

Socrates' identification of *virtue* with *knowledge* is famous. Knowledge, he declared, depends on reason. While the evil man misses the mark by his ignorance, the good man, guided by real knowledge, finds true fulfillment.

It appears that Socrates throughout his life was guided by moral considerations. Still, he was not a puritan, for he did not have a negative concept of morality. To him the good life was not one of prohibitions and taboos; rather, it was one of self-realization leading to an appreciation of the excellent things in existence. Unlike the puritans, he did not despise human knowledge. To him, to be moral did not mean to be completely simple intellectually; rather, it implied high-mindedness and the utilization of all the capacities of man.

Yet in some ways Socrates resembled the Sophists. Not that his conclusions were the same, but he shared their interests. Like them, he had little understanding and love for the natural sciences; and he was blind to esthetic factors. To him, as to the Sophists, the fundamental problem of philosophy was man, not nature. But his concept

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118.

of knowledge was quite different from that of the Sophists. They interpreted knowledge as a manifestation of sensations. Socrates, on the other hand, relied upon *insight*. This direct awareness of the nature of reality became the key to his moral teachings. He affirmed the value of intuitive wisdom. What mattered was not the quantitative expansion of knowledge but, rather, the achievement of a broad perspective, the ability to know the truth and to understand the world. The teachers of his time frequently believed in trivialities. Since they were pedantic, they often quibbled about unimportant things. Socrates, however, kept his eye on *essentials* and was concerned with the perennial problems of human life.

According to Xenophon, Socrates held that knowledge has a social implication. This is one reason why he spoke so much against the natural scientists, who, he thought, could never achieve definite truth:

"Do these explorers into the divine operations hope that when they have discovered by what forces the various phenomena occur, they will create winds and waters at will, and fruitful seasons? Will they manipulate these and the like to suit their needs? or has no such notion perhaps ever entered their heads, and will they be content simply to know how such things come into existence? But if this was his mode of describing those who meddle with such matters as these, he himself never wearied of discussing human topics: What is piety? What is impiety? What is the beautiful? what the ugly? What the noble? what the base? What are meant by just and unjust? . . . What is a state? what is a statesman? what is a ruler over men? what is a ruling character? and other like problems, the knowledge of which, as he put it, conferred a patent of nobility on the possessor, whereas those who lacked the knowledge might deservedly be stigmatized as slaves."<sup>11</sup>

To achieve knowledge, self-examination is indispensable. Thus we must get rid of our prejudices and biases and abandon all generalizations. Socrates' task was to point out the inadequacies and the fallacies of Athenian thinking. He pursued truth with an untiring and single-minded determination.

Real education demands that the mind be emptied of all refuse and unsubstantiated beliefs. It demands a process of *reconstruction*. Socrates maintained that the unexamined life is not worth living, for an existence based on complete conformity and complete credulity is animalistic. Not worthy of the free man, it leads only to cultural

<sup>11</sup> Xenophon (Cornford, *op. cit.*, p. 178).

regression. It is our task, Socrates reminded us, to ask why, and to be persistent in our queries, regardless of the result.

This explains why the vocation of philosophy is so important. It is the philosopher's task not merely to teach useful things but to find the truth. A philosopher, Socrates asserted, is not to be deterred by external obstacles, by social disapproval, and by persecution. His is a sacred task, absolutely necessary for the maintenance of civilization.

The religious tone of Socrates' discourse cannot be neglected. We remember, in the *Apology*, that he said he would obey God rather than the authorities, being certain that he was guided by a divine force. He believed in Providence, and there is reason to suppose that he looked forward to immortality. But his concept of God was different from that of the popular mind; it was incorporeal rather than material.

Socrates' method is especially important for the student of philosophy. Like Zeno, he used dialectic, which would grant, for the sake of argument, the contention of the view which is to be combated and then dispose of it by showing its absurdity. His method was founded on the belief that there are *absolute truths* and that intellectual clarity can best be achieved by *universal* definitions. He stressed the dialectical process of bringing out truth as the best tool for education, for it clearly points out inconsistencies, works against all intellectual pretensions, and makes the process of knowledge truly functional.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Relate the main events in the life of Socrates.
2. According to Socrates, what is the function of philosophy?
3. Describe the ideals of Socrates.
4. What is the Socratic concept of God?
5. How did Socrates view death?
6. Explain Socrates' doctrine that "virtue is knowledge."
7. In what ways did Socrates anticipate the spirit of Christ?
8. Describe the dialectical method of Socrates.
9. How modern is Socrates' philosophy?
10. What have been some of the interpretations of Socrates? What is your own interpretation of his philosophy?
11. Discuss the viewpoint of Socrates that "the unexamined life is not worth living." Do we live an unexamined life in the United States? Justify your answer.

## PLATO'S SEARCH FOR REALITY

. . . . .

### INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

Plato's philosophy ranks among the most profound and comprehensive systems in the history of philosophy. It has seldom been surpassed in its beauty and literary setting, for Plato was not merely a philosopher but also a dramatist of ideas. In him philosophy became completely alive and intensely moving. The effectiveness of Plato was heightened by his use of the dialogue. Thus, we invariably have a personal setting. The atmosphere is not abstract and austere; rather, there is a touch of intimacy. We feel a sense of leisure. And, unlike the modern college professor, Plato did not feel constrained to write a certain number of books. He wrote whenever he desired and when inspiration guided him.

To approach the philosophy of Plato, we must understand the influences which conditioned his ideas:

(1) One important influence was Pythagoras, who gave him an intense respect for mathematics and a high concept of philosophy. Many of the Platonic religious ideas were derived from Pythagorean mysticism. And the dualism that prevailed in Pythagoras can be found in Plato.



(2) Likewise, Plato owed a great debt to the Eleatics: Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus had pointed out that the only reality lies in Being, and that change cannot be conceived. Plato identified his Ideas with the Being of the Eleatics, and, like the latter, he thought that the realm of Forms is uncreated and exempt from the ravages of time.

(3) He was also influenced by the concept of mind as taught by Anaxagoras. Plato, however, changed Anaxagoras' meaning, for he conceived mind not as corporeal but as immaterial and guided by cosmic purposes.

(4) Heraclitus also played his part in the formation of the philosophy of Plato, although it was mainly in a negative way. Plato held that the realm of reality cannot be described as a process of flux, and he refused to accept the ethics of Heraclitus. Heraclitus was a Nietzschean, whereas Plato's writings remind us of Christian ethics, although there is less asceticism in Plato than in Christianity.

(5) We also find the influence of the Sophists in Plato although he regarded them mainly as obstacles which he tried to destroy. Especially sharp was his attack on the concepts of Protagoras and Gorgias.

(6) Most important, however, was the influence of Socrates. Plato's teachings formed the climax to the views of his teacher. Like Socrates, he believed in virtue and absolute standards. He was not an objective scientist, for his main concern was to establish the supremacy of the Good. Pupils of Socrates, such as Euclid of Megara, already had identified the Good with Being. This identification was continued by Plato, who made the intelligible world the source of all universal values.

## SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Plato, in his lifetime, 427-347 B.C., witnessed an unending change in political and social affairs. He was still quite young when the Peloponnesian War ended, with Athens humiliated by the victories of the Spartans. Ironically enough, a few years later the Persians and the Athenians, aided by Corinth, Thebes, and Argos, joined forces against Sparta and defeated the Spartan fleet in the battle of Cnidus in 394 B.C. The Athenians, aided by the generous support of the Persians, rebuilt the long walls.

The spirit of Salamis and Marathon had long been forgotten. The Athenians, determined to restore their empire, were willing to make an alliance with anyone who would promote their military strength.

In the wars between Thebes and Sparta, which lasted from 379 to 362 B.C., Athens joined Thebes and defeated the Spartans in various sea battles. Gradually the Athenian empire was extended to include over seventy communities. In 371 B.C., at the battle of Leuctra, the Spartans were defeated by the brilliant Theban general Epaminondas. The victory established the supremacy of Thebes in Greece, and from 371 to 362 Thebes remained in power. Meanwhile Athens switched sides and aided Sparta to establish the balance of power. It can be seen that there was little loyalty in Athenian politics.

This balance of power continued until Macedonia became supreme. In 359 B.C., Philip the Second started his rule of Macedonia and almost immediately began a process of expansion. By 352 he had advanced as far as Thermopylae, where he was temporarily halted by the Athenians. A year later, Demosthenes warned the Athenians of the great danger facing them from the Macedonians. In 348 B.C. various subject states of Athens were conquered by Philip; and by 347, when Plato died, it already appeared certain that Philip would become the master of all Greece.

### THE LIFE OF PLATO

Whereas Socrates came from middle-class parents, Plato had a distinguished aristocratic background. His father was a descendant of one of the kings of Athens; his mother came from the family of Solon. He had many relatives who were active in political affairs, the majority on the side of the aristocracy. His education was supervised very carefully. There was the conventional curriculum—music, gymnastics, and instruction in the old poets, especially in Homer. We are told that he distinguished himself on the battlefield; in fact, he showed all-around excellence.

We must not think of Plato as a bookish thinker. Besides being an excellent athlete, he was interested in art; and there are accounts that he wanted to be a dramatist. From the very beginning he showed exceptional intellectual promise.

Plato's conversion to the philosophic life took several years. His first teacher was Cratylus, who taught the Heraclitean doctrines, refusing to make any positive intellectual assertions. Plato then came under the influence of Socrates, and his life was changed completely. Previously he had been politically ambitious; everyone knowing him thought he would be prominent in Athenian affairs, for he was handsome, talented, and had family background and ability. But the death of Socrates changed his outlook. He began to

realize that the Athenians were unstable, and he developed an intense contempt for the form of democracy which had killed their wisest citizen.

After the death of Socrates, Plato undertook various travels, due, perhaps, to the violent feeling of the Athenians against all the followers of Socrates. He went to Megara and later to Italy, where he visited the Pythagoreans, becoming especially friendly with Archytas, the chieftain of Tarentum.

Plato then made a visit to Syracuse—indeed a fateful step. He was invited there through Dion, who was related to the reigning king, Dionysius the First of Syracuse, a tyrant of the city for over thirty-eight years. As a ruthless conqueror, Dionysius the First usually sold his victims into slavery and even robbed temples of their treasures. It was reported that he sold the robe of the goddess Hera to the Carthaginians for 120 talents. But he expanded the realm of Syracuse, and he had a love for the arts. Consequently, in beautifying Syracuse, he made it one of the most magnificent cities of the Hellenic world. He had pretensions in literature; and one of his plays, *Ransom of Hector*, won a prize in Athens.

The relationship between the tyrant and the philosopher was strained, since they had divergent views on politics and art. Dionysius caused Plato to be sold as a slave. This was a simple matter, for he merely handed Plato over to the Spartans, who, at this time, were at war with the Athenians. But Plato was fortunate, for one of his friends, recognizing him at a slave market, caused him to be freed and sent home.

At Athens, Plato devoted himself to philosophic instruction, mainly at the Academy, where he taught political science, mathematics, and dialectic. Many of the ruling princes of the Greek world sent their sons to him for study and enlightenment. The instruction which he provided was quite informal and consisted mainly of a personal interchange of views between teacher and students.

When Dionysius died, in 367 B.C., he was succeeded by his son, who, lacking the ability of his father, turned for advice to his uncle Dion. Plato was reinvited to Syracuse. He accepted and was well received. For a time he was extremely popular with the new king, and the court studied his theories of politics and education. But the army was opposed to Plato; and there were rumors which linked him to the enemies of the king. Although Dion himself showed great affection for him, Plato wanted to return to Athens. When a war broke out, he therefore used the opportunity to leave Syracuse.

Meanwhile Dion had been exiled, and he and his nephew had become bitter enemies. Still, Dion was intent upon reconciliation; and, when the war was over, he urged Plato to return to Syracuse. Both Dion and Plato had hopes that the king might become a model ruler. The short visit proved to be a complete failure. Plato, unable to reform the king, became a prisoner and was released only through the vigorous efforts of Archytas. He returned to Athens, where he continued his teachings.

His old age was marred by various disappointments. He supported Dion in his attempt to seize the rule at Syracuse. At first Dion was successful, but then he was stabbed by Callippus, who was also a student at the Academy. Chaos resulted. Callippus could not maintain his power, and in 346 B.C. the king returned to Syracuse, again to become its ruler. But the citizens still disliked him, and finally they were delivered from his tyranny by Timoleon, who ruled from 344 to 337 B.C. Under him Syracuse experienced a golden era. He was a philosopher-king of whom Plato would have approved, but unfortunately Plato did not witness his reign, for he died in 347 B.C., presumably while attending a banquet. Cicero maintained that to the end of his life Plato was busy working on another dialogue.

### THE WORKS OF PLATO

Scholars have tried to discover the order in which Plato's works were written. The most accurate account is given by Campbell and Lutoslawski, who divided his literary productions into four periods: the first, the Socratic group; the second, the first Platonic group; the third, the middle Platonic group; the fourth, the works of his later period.

In the Socratic series, we find such dialogues as the *Apology*, which contains an eloquent defense of Socrates; the *Crito*, which tells of the fidelity of Socrates to the laws of Athens; the *Euthyphro*, which contains an outline of the ideal of piety which Socrates cherished. There follow other dialogues, including the *Charmides*, which discusses among other things the concept of temperance; the *Laches*, which deals with moral ideals, especially courage; the *Lysis*, which has the theme of friendship and shows that friendship has a transcendental meaning. Then we have the *Protagoras*, which deals with the teachability of virtue and attacks the relativistic views of Protagoras. The *Meno* gives an intimation of Plato's own concept of knowledge and defines knowledge as recollection. The *Euthydemus* also is directed against the Sophists, especially against their logical fallacies.

The *Gorgias*, likewise, inveighs against the superficiality of Sophist rhetoric. It gives an excellent contrast between the philosopher and the practical politician who used Sophist principles.

The first Platonic series includes the *Cratylus*, which has been neglected by the historians of philosophy, although it is quite significant, for it contains Plato's concept of language. He maintained that words do not arise purely from artificial convention and showed that a knowledge of truth must come before a knowledge of words. In it he also gave a comprehensive account of verbal fallacies. There follows the *Symposium*, which deals with his concept of love; the *Phaedo*, which gives an impressive account of his doctrines of immortality; and the early books of the *Republic*.

The middle Platonic group comprises the later books of the *Republic*, outlining Plato's concept of the ideal state. The *Phaedrus* starts out with a speech of Lysis on love, followed by a full discussion of the nature of Eros; also, there are references to philosophical rhetoric. The dialogue combines the theory of Ideas with the Orphic belief in transmigration of souls. Then we have the *Theaetetus*, dealing with the problems of epistemology and directed against the Protagorean view that man is the measure of all things. There is the *Parmenides*, exposing the concept of the Ideas to criticism. The *Parmenides* reveals that Plato was conscious of the paradoxes which his view of the Ideas involved.

Finally we have the dialogues of his later years. The *Sophist* is a continuation of the epistemological viewpoint of the *Theaetetus*. The *Politicus*, or the *Statesman*, is an attempt to depict an expert statesman who alone can rule the state. The *Philebus* contains a discussion of ethics and shows how pleasure is related to the Good; likewise, it portrays the influence of Pythagoreanism. The *Timaeus*, which was extremely influential in the Middle Ages, contains many of Plato's most significant cosmological doctrines. The *Critias* pictures an agricultural utopia, which is compared with the imperialistic power of Atlantis.

The last work of Plato is the *Laws*. Containing his political and social ideals, it is a continuation of the *Republic*. In it there are also discussions of science, metaphysics, and religion. This last work is characterized by a dogmatic and austere spirit.

## PLATO'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

In turning to Plato's epistemological theories, we find that he starts the process of knowledge by a discussion of *imagination*, the *first*

*stage of opinion.* In this state, knowledge is very imperfect and can scarcely distinguish between illusion and fact; everything is hazy, indefinite, and vague. The difference between external and internal sensation is scarcely noticed, nor is there a clear distinction between subjective and objective viewpoints.

The second stage of opinion he calls *assurance* or *confidence*. In this state we learn to describe *objective phenomena*. Thought becomes more distinct and more clearly defined. We realize that there is a difference between our own views and the external world. We note that phenomena exist outside ourselves and cannot be controlled by our wishes. All this brings about a feeling of confidence in our mental powers. But as yet our knowledge is not unified; we merely perceive an unending flux: a Heraclitean picture of the universe.

We then arrive at the third stage, which Plato calls *intelligent understanding*. We leave the realm of opinion behind and enter the province of *real knowledge*. Intelligent understanding makes it possible for us to *describe* phenomena. We establish a relationship between causes and effects. Briefly, we are using our scientific resources. Previously the universe appeared chaotic and disordered, but now we realize that it obeys definite laws, thereby making it possible for us to control the forces of nature.

Science, however, according to Plato, does not give us a concept of true reality. It is lacking in many respects. It accepts first principles and is still dependent upon sense knowledge, thereby giving us an incomplete view of nature. It deals too much with concrete objects and concrete phenomena, and Plato believed that knowledge in its highest aspects must transcend phenomena and concrete representations.

Plato's view has important consequences. It signifies that science is not the key to reality and that real knowledge must be *freed from bondage to the senses*. This freedom is attained by dialectic, or philosophy, which attempts a unification of knowledge. Leaving the realm of phenomena behind, philosophy is concerned with the realm of immaterial *Forms*. Reason, thus, gives complete order and unity. It synthesizes all the other aspects of knowledge and produces a splendid view of the interrelationship and interdependence of knowledge.

Ultimately, however, Plato maintained, not even reason is sufficient. The final stage of the mind involves *mystical intuition*, by which we obtain a vision of the intelligible realm of Ideas. Invol-

ing a transformation of our inner being, it negates the limitations of time and space. We become part of the absolute realm of beauty and truth. *Thus a strain of mysticism enters Plato's epistemological concepts.*

An excellent account of Plato's concept of knowledge is given in his allegory of the *cave*, which we find in the seventh book of the *Republic*:

"And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open toward the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

"I see.

"And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

"You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners."<sup>1</sup>

Plato explained that these prisoners of the cave cannot see anything but shadows. To them, truth means only the shadow of images:

"And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look toward the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned toward more real existence, he has a clearer vision,—what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them,—will he not be perplexed?

<sup>1</sup> *Republic*, VII, 514–515.

Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

"Far truer.

"And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take refuge in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?"<sup>2</sup>

When dragged upwards, the prisoners of the cave are at first dazzled by the excessive light of day. Finally able to see the sun, they begin to understand that the visible sun is the cause of all things. They, in turn, develop a feeling of pity for the unfortunate inhabitants of the cave.

Plato described the meaning of the allegory: "The prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed—whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed."<sup>3</sup>

The task of knowledge is liberation from the underground cave of the sensible world, which contains merely a collection of physical objects. We cannot be satisfied, Plato wrote, until we reach the realm of Forms existing in the world above, which contains true knowledge. In the cave we can see only our own reflections, vague shadows which create an atmosphere of unreality. Above, in the intelligible realm, we are enlightened by the Ideas, and we obtain a true knowledge of eternity.

What does this view of knowledge imply? Plato taught that the senses hold man in bondage, and the objects of the everyday world, which present us with flux and change, are not real. Absolute knowledge demands an effort which can be achieved only by the few. In Plato's epistemology an *aristocratic* tone prevails. The phi-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.



osopher, to his way of thinking, is a lonely man who, having such a sublime view of truth, is bound to be misunderstood by his contemporaries.

Plato's doctrine of recollection now confronts us. The question arises, How do we understand universal Ideas? In the phenomenal world we have only sensible objects, fleeting and changing. Plato maintained, especially in the *Meno*, that when we have a recollection of knowledge, we are reminded of the universal objects which we saw before our birth. Our souls, he held, before being imprisoned in our bodies, had a view of eternal Forms, and we are darkly reminded of them in our existence on earth. Certain universal principles, then, are innate and *a priori* and are not derived from our environment.

We shall notice that throughout the history of philosophy an intense conflict has been waged between those who, like Plato, believe in *a priori* knowledge and those who, like Locke, feel that all knowledge is derived from our environment and the senses. Plato's view is rationalistic and leads to the exaltation of *universal* principles. Locke's view, on the other hand, is empirical and psychological and emphasizes the reality of the individual. The Platonic view resulted in a wave of mysticism, which we find, especially, in Neo-Platonism, a movement which arose at the end of the period of ancient philosophy.

### PLATO'S DOCTRINE OF IDEAS

In Plato's world, the sensible realm of becoming, change, and transformations is not the object of knowledge. We can have no certain understanding of it; we can only form opinions of it which are bound to be fallacious. Reality must be *immaterial* and must be described by infallible laws. Moreover, reality must satisfy our esthetic needs. It cannot be mechanistic, as Anaxagoras had supposed, for it must fulfill our desire for absolute perfection. The Sophists had stressed the existence of particular things, with the individual as the judge of truth. In fact, Gorgias maintained there is no reality. Plato's view suggests the opposite. *Reality does exist; it is the true source of all being and all knowledge.*

What then is more important, the universal or the individual? We already have an inkling of the answer. Plato stated categorically: the universal. This viewpoint is called realism. Epistemologically, the Platonic view implies that knowledge is not concerned with the individual, with Tom, Dick, and Harry. Rather, it is

concerned with essences and with the *universal Forms* of Tom, Dick, and Harry. The specific aspect of things, according to Plato, does not last. It is merged into the flux; but the Forms (Ideas) have an eternal existence.

Plato's description of the nature of Ideas reminds us of Parmenides, except that in Plato the Ideas have lost their corporeal status. The Ideas, Plato asserted, exist always; since they are uncreated, they do not pass away. They are perfect and absolute, and they are not subject to the limitations of the senses.

It must be remembered that the Ideas are also *ideals* and objects of aspiration. The Idea of beauty is more perfect than any corporeal representation we may perceive. The Idea of beauty is a standard for all evaluation. *In short, the Ideas are not only ontological but also teleological concepts.* We have Ideas not only for mental and intellectual values, but also for physical objects and qualities. We even have Ideas for artificial objects such as chairs, houses, and so on.

In Plato's later dialogues, especially the *Parmenides*, the problem arises: Can there be Ideas for ugly things? The *Parmenides* represents a discussion between Socrates, who is still quite young, Parmenides, who is old, and Zeno, who is in his middle years. In this dialogue, Socrates rejects the concept that there can be Ideas for such physical objects as mud. Parmenides replies that when Socrates becomes more mature, he will change his viewpoint and will not despise even the meanest things.

The dialogue in the *Parmenides* indicates that Plato never completely solved the relationship between Ideas and concrete objects. For example, Parmenides raises the problem as to whether the individual participates in the whole Idea or only in part of it. Both viewpoints lead to contradictions. Socrates holds that Ideas represent only thoughts; but this, likewise, does not help us, for *thoughts must be of objects*. If we say that Ideas exist in themselves, having an autonomous relationship, then they cannot be understood by our minds at all.

In the dialogue, Parmenides turns to Socrates and says: "In the first place, I think, Socrates, that you, or anyone who maintains the existence of absolute essences, will admit that they cannot exist in us.

"No, said Socrates; for then they would be no longer absolute.

"True, he said; and therefore when ideas are what they are in relation to one another, their essence is determined by a relation

among themselves, and has nothing to do with the resemblances, or whatever they are to be termed, which are in our sphere, and from which we receive this or that name when we partake of them. And the things which are within our sphere and have the same names with them, are likewise only relative to one another, and not to the ideas which have the same names with them, but belong to themselves and not to them.

"What do you mean? said Socrates.

"I may illustrate my meaning in this way, said Parmenides:—A master has a slave; now there is nothing absolute in the relation between them, which is simply a relation of one man to another. But there is also an idea of mastership in the abstract, which is relative to the idea of slavery in the abstract. These natures have nothing to do with us, nor we with them; they are concerned with themselves only, and we with ourselves. Do you see my meaning?

"Yes, said Socrates, I quite see your meaning."<sup>4</sup>

We might escape the dilemma by saying that Ideas exist in the mind of God, who possesses all knowledge; but do we know the mind of God? The answer is, No. Thus, the Ideas are still unexplained.

The outcome of the dialogue is tentative skepticism, for although many fundamental problems have been raised, no categorical answers are given.

"These, Socrates, said Parmenides, are a few, and only a few of the difficulties in which we are involved if ideas really are and we determine each one of them to be an absolute unity. He who hears what may be said against them will deny the very existence of them—and even if they do exist, he will say that they must of necessity be unknown to man; and he will seem to have reason on his side, and as we were remarking just now, will be very difficult to convince; a man must be gifted with very considerable ability before he can learn that everything has a class and an absolute essence; and still more remarkable will he be who discovers all these things for himself, and having thoroughly investigated them is able to teach them to others.

"I agree with you, Parmenides, said Socrates; and what you say is very much to my mind.

"And yet, Socrates, said Parmenides, if a man, fixing his attention on these and the like difficulties, does away with ideas of things and will not admit that every individual thing has its own deter-

<sup>4</sup> *Parmenides*, 133-134.

minate idea which is always one and the same, he will have nothing on which his mind can rest; and so he will utterly destroy the power of reasoning, as you seem to me to have particularly noted.

"Very true, he said.

"But, then, what is to become of philosophy? Whither shall we turn, if the ideas are unknown?

"I certainly do not see my way at present."<sup>5</sup>

We now come to the problem of truth and error. Again Plato differed from the Sophists. He showed that knowledge cannot be defined according to perception. It is not a relative thing, nor is it dependent upon opinion. Thus, if we say that what is true is merely a matter of opinion, then why should we take anyone's word for it?

Knowledge employs, furthermore, the use of categories, which, however, we do not obtain through our sense experiences but through reason.

*Error arises, according to Plato, when we adhere to a relativistic concept of knowledge and rely on our opinions rather than on reason. When we analyze the paradoxes, we discover that certain Forms can be combined while others cannot be used together. Fallacies represent contradictory Forms, whereas true knowledge lies in our ability to use the Forms which are harmonious. The Sophists, according to Plato, had perverted the meaning of philosophy, for they had maintained that what exists does not exist and had therefore specialized in deception. The task of the true philosopher, on the other hand, is to clarify the question as to how Forms can be combined and made intelligible.*

### THE IDEA OF THE GOOD

The crowning glory of Plato's doctrine of Ideas is the concept of the Good. He compared it with the sun in the visible world; for as the sun is the source of all light, so the Idea of the Good is the source of all knowledge. To some extent, the Idea of the Good approaches the status of divinity, for it is the source of Being and superior to truth and knowledge. The Good, according to Plato, not only is the author of knowledge but far exceeds knowledge in dignity and power.

To summarize Plato's view of the Idea of the Good, we find that it is superior to all truth and beauty. As the creator of both existence and essences it sustains all Being. Thus, we have a three-

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

storied metaphysical universe: *first, the sensible world; second, the Ideas; third, the Idea of the Good.*

But there is another interpretation of Plato's metaphysical arrangement, which regards the Ideas merely as *logical essences*. Thus they do not subsist apart from the objects they embody. For example, Einstein's Law of Relativity does not subsist in an independent realm; it is part of the objects it describes. Likewise, the Idea of the Good merely represents the complete outline of the universe. It does not have an ontological status. It contains only the logical interrelationship of phenomena.

Thus, there are two views of Plato's theory of Ideas. The first, which is traditional, is ontological and pictures a three-storied universe. The second view, which is more modern in origin, regards Plato's Ideas as logical essences and pictures a one-storied universe.

### THE NATURE OF THE PHILOSOPHER

Plato's concept of philosophy was very lofty. Philosophy, according to him, deals not merely with an explanation of phenomena; indeed, this would be an inferior task. Rather, philosophy represents a vision of truth and real Being. The philosopher, Plato stated, is most interested in the welfare of the soul. He is temperate; he is the spectator of all time and all existence. Some of the philosopher's other traits Plato described as gentleness, sociability, and harmoniousness. Common opinion, however, has the opposite viewpoint and regards philosophers as being either villainous or useless.

Why are philosophers regarded as impractical? It appears that mankind is unwilling to employ their talents and is governed by those who are dominated by illusions, never having absorbed the philosophical spirit. Moreover, some of the followers of philosophy put it into disrepute.

Plato gave various reasons why philosophers so easily deteriorate. Primarily, he said, there are very few philosophers; they are, indeed, rare among mankind. Second, philosophers may be distracted by outside activities. A thinker, for example, may engage in war instead of contemplating eternity. Third, he may be tempted by the ordinary goods of life, such as wealth and political connections. Fourth, being of a more sensitive nature, a philosopher is more easily exposed to injury than the common mass of mankind. "The most gifted minds, when they are ill conducted, become often preeminently bad." Fifth, the force of public opinion often corrupts philosophy, for the thinker is exposed to all kinds of social currents

and frequently is contaminated by the idols of his time. His concept of good and evil, many times, will be absorbed from that of the masses. To survive, he will have to conform; thus, his independence is constantly threatened. Sixth, philosophy is threatened by persecution. Death awaits those who do not agree with the masses (apparently Plato was thinking of the fate of Socrates when he made this assertion).

What is significant in this view of the philosopher is Plato's appreciation of real objectivity. His ideal philosopher is almost Spinozistic. We find a man who focuses his eyes, not on the changing world but on eternity; a man who lives alone in majestic solitude, inevitably misunderstood by his contemporaries. But Plato pointed out that such a man owes a debt to humanity and therefore cannot remain isolated. Thus, in the *Republic* he explained how the philosopher can best serve the state.

### GOD AND THE SOUL

When we turn to Plato's concept of God, we realize immediately that it is different from the Homeric view. Did not Homer picture the gods as being intensely human? Did not Homer spread immoral tales about the gods? In Plato's early dialogues, there is very little detailed analysis of the gods. In the *Republic*, he makes it clear that the gods cannot be the creators of evil and that therefore we must seek other causes. In the *Phaedo*, the gods are our guides after death, but still they do not play a prominent part. In the *Timaeus*, we find the myth of creation, which we shall discuss later. God appears as a ruler, but he does not create the world from nothing as Jehovah did.

Plato's discussion of the gods appears most fully in the *Laws*, in which he is especially concerned with the atheists, whom he condemns most strongly. He tried to prove that the gods exist, that they care for humanity, and that they must be worshiped according to the laws of the country. In the *Laws* God is the supreme principle of life, and, to some extent, has replaced the Forms. The picture is almost theistic, reminding us of Calvinistic theocracy. Atheists are punished mercilessly, and Plato suggests the use of secret informers to report to the authorities of the state anyone who disbelieves in the gods.

In his discussion of religion, Plato pointed out that the soul is prior to the body and that it guides nature *teleologically*. He identified souls with the gods. The confutation of atheism is most clearly

given in the tenth book of the *Laws*, in which the main speaker, the Athenian, represents the Platonic viewpoint:

"*Athenian*. No one who believes in the existence of gods such as the law acknowledges ever voluntarily does an impious deed or utters a lawless word. If he does so, it is for one of three reasons. Either he does not believe in the gods, as I said, or, secondly, he believes that they exist, but have no care for mankind; or, thirdly, that they are easy to be entreated and turned aside by sacrifice and prayer."<sup>6</sup>

Cleinias, who comes from Crete, believes it is easy to be convinced of the existence of gods. Do not all men, Greeks and barbarians alike, believe in them? The Athenian holds a different viewpoint. The atheists will not be impressed by this argument.

"*Athenian*. In the first place they say that gods do not exist in nature, but are the product of deliberate conventions, which, moreover, vary from place to place, according as each set of men agreed together to make laws for themselves; also that what is naturally honorable is not the same as what is legally enjoined as such; while the principles of justice have no natural existence at all, but mankind is always disputing about them and each alteration has no natural validity, but is valid as a matter of deliberate convention just at the time and place where it is made.

"All these statements are made by men whom young people think wise, poets and prose-writers, who declare that the perfection of right is any claim that violence can make good. Hence our young men are afflicted with impiety, for they think that gods such as those which the law bids us to believe in, do not exist; and there arises a faction who invite them to live the true life according to nature, which really means to escape from the slavery of legal subjection to others, and to live in dominion over them."<sup>7</sup>

The *Athenian* proceeds by pointing out that atheism should be met by persuasion, if possible. He describes the philosophy of the natural scientist, who, he thinks, does not understand the significance of the soul:

"The opinions I have described imply a belief that fire, water, earth, and air are the primary things, called 'nature,' and that soul is a later thing, derived from them; indeed, that is the plain meaning of the theory. Have we not here laid bare the source of the unwise

<sup>6</sup> *Laws* x, 885B (abridged), Cornford, ed., *Greek religious thought from Homer to the age of Alexander*, p. 213.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

belief held by all these inquirers in the science of nature? The argument should be carefully examined at every point. It is a matter of great importance, if it can be shown that the leaders of irreligious thought have gone astray in their reasoning. I must pursue a line of thought that is perhaps unfamiliar. This philosophy which manufactures irreligious minds inverts the natural order, placing last what should be first, namely the primary cause of the generation and destruction of all things. Hence their error about the true nature of the gods. Nearly all betray their ignorance of the character and significance of soul, and especially of its origin. They do not know that soul is one of the first things, older than any kind of body, whose changes and transpositions it certainly controls. And if soul is older than body, it follows that the order of things to which soul belongs must be prior to the things of the body."<sup>8</sup>

### THE SOUL

As can be seen, much of Plato's philosophy depends on his concept of the soul. Teaching the pre-existence of the soul, he explained its existence on earth as due to the fact that it has fallen from its divine status. He believed in reincarnation, a doctrine which undoubtedly was influenced by the Orphic and Pythagorean philosophy.

In Plato we find a very elaborate description of the afterlife. For a thousand years after death the soul retains its personality. Following this period comes a real extinction, and the individual soul loses all contact with its memory. The souls are informed that they can choose the type of life they desire. This choice does not involve real freedom, for the life they prefer is determined by their previous existence. The evil man usually chooses an inferior existence, whereas the good man selects a better existence. In the new reincarnation there are no personal ties with the past. There is only a *continuity of character*.

According to Plato, the philosopher will be especially rewarded. After death he will live with the gods, provided he has not taught fallacious doctrines. On the other hand, those who have lived the life of the senses will become animals, such as wolves, and will be punished for their sensuality. This idea involves the view that the soul is superior to the body, and, consequently, Plato defended the belief in the immortality of the soul. One of his arguments is based on the unity of opposites. Life implies death, and death implies life. We cannot think of one without the other; both are necessary. If

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.



only death prevailed, the universe could not continue. *So death must turn into life.*

Another Platonic argument is that the soul must have existed before birth. We have a recollection of its pre-existence. Plato felt that in this life we perceive only relative, not absolute, standards. Our knowledge of absolute Ideas must be due to pre-existence. He held that the soul is simple and unalterable and thus cannot be touched by death, which destroys only material and composite things.

Vigorous objections to Plato's view are made in the *Phaedo*. Cebes and Simmias assert that the soul is the harmony of the body and, consequently, depends upon the body for existence. Socrates, the spokesman for Plato in the dialogue, maintains the opposite viewpoint: The soul is superior to the body and independent of it. It cannot be destroyed by various reincarnations, for it always remains the same.

"And is it likely that the soul, which is invisible, in passing to the place of the true Hades, which like her is invisible, and pure, and noble, and on her way to the good and wise God, whither, if God will, my soul is also soon to go—that the soul, I repeat, if this be her nature and origin, will be blown away and destroyed immediately on quitting the body, as the many say? That can never be, my dear Simmias and Cebes. The truth, rather, is that the soul which is pure at departing and draws after her no bodily taint, having never voluntarily during life had connection with the body, which she is ever avoiding, herself gathered into herself;—and making such abstraction her perpetual study—which means that she has been a true disciple of philosophy; and therefore has in fact been always engaged in the practice of dying? For is not philosophy the study of death?

"Certainly—

"That soul, I say, herself invisible, departs to the invisible world—to the divine and immortal and rational: hither arriving, she is secure of bliss and is released from the error and folly of men, their fears and wild passions and all other human ills, and for ever dwells, as they say of the initiated, in company with the gods."<sup>9</sup>

Plato also stated in the *Phaedo* that the soul participates in the Idea of life, thereby excluding the opposite concept, the Idea of death. According to him, the immortal is imperishable, and, therefore, the soul cannot be destroyed. When death attacks a man, the mortal portion of him dies while the immortal substance is preserved for eternity.

<sup>9</sup> *Phaedo*, 80–81.

Another argument reveals that the soul is not governed by any external agency but is self-moving and, consequently, is regarded as being without beginning or end. Plato's view of the soul had important consequences:

"But then, O my friends, he said, if the soul is really immortal, what care should be taken of her, not only in respect of the portion of time which is called life, but of eternity! And the danger of neglecting her from this point of view does indeed appear to be awful. If death had only been the end of all, the wicked would have had a good bargain in dying, for they would have been happily quit not only of their body, but of their own evil together with their souls. But now, inasmuch as the soul is manifestly immortal, there is no release or salvation from evil except the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom. For the soul when on her progress to the world below takes nothing with her but nurture and education; and these are said greatly to benefit or greatly to injure the departed, at the very beginning of his journey thither."<sup>10</sup>

It must be pointed out that Plato was not concerned with personal salvation. He was quite different from most of the later Christian theologians. In fact, in Plato the Oriental view of the afterlife was dominant. Consequently he subordinated personality to the search for true Being, which can only be found in a *reunion with the divine*.

There are also indications, as the *Symposium* shows, that Plato thought of immortality as a state of the mind. By identifying ourselves with the principle of absolute beauty and truth, we obtain not only a true view of reality but a view of deathlessness. Once we absorb this vision, he declared, we are not touched by the passage of time. We have become emancipated from the limitations of our senses. We are able, in short, to view life under the aspect of eternity.

### THE PROBLEM OF CREATION

Most of the salient views of Plato regarding creation are contained in the *Timaeus*. To the modern observer it appears to be among the most superficial and naive of Plato's dialogues, although it had an immense influence upon the Neo-Platonists and thinkers of the Middle Ages.

The *Timaeus* tells the myth of Atlantis and describes how Athens fought against the power of Atlantis, delivering Europe and Libya

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

from its enslavement. The story inspired many utopian writers, especially Sir Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon. The dialogue, however, is mainly concerned with metaphysical problems. We are told by Timaeus, the narrator, why the Creator made this world. The main reason was his goodness:

"He was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be. This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world, as we shall do well in believing on the testimony of wise men: God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable. Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other. Now the deeds of the best could never be or have been other than the fairest; and the creator, reflecting on the things which are by nature visible, found that no unintelligent creature taken as a whole was fairer than the intelligent taken as a whole; and that intelligence could not be present in anything which was devoid of soul. For which reason, when he was framing the universe, he put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, that he might be the creator of a work which was by nature fairest and best. Wherefore, using the language of probability, we may say that the world became a living creature truly endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God."<sup>11</sup>

The question arises, Are there many worlds, or was only one universe created? We remember that many of the pre-Socratic philosophers believed in a plurality of worlds. In the *Timaeus* we are informed there is only one world, composed of fire and earth and united by air and water. It is perfect, spherical in form, self-sufficient, and not subject to decay. In its center God put the soul, which he made from two substances—the indivisible (the Same) and the divisible (*i.e.*, the Other).

At the same time God decided to make creation more perfect; consequently, he endowed it with immortality. He resolved to have a moving image of eternity: time.

"... and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and this image we call time. For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all

<sup>11</sup> *Timaeus*, 29-30.

parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal essence; for we say that he 'was', he 'is', he 'will be', but the truth is that 'is' alone is properly attributed to him, and that 'was' and 'will be' are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same cannot become older or younger by time, nor ever did or has become, or hereafter will be, older or younger, nor is subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause. These are the forms of time, which imitates eternity and revolves according to a law of number."<sup>12</sup>

In the *Timaeus* we are told the seven planets preserve the remembrance of time, and the sun was created to afford the measure of their swiftness. It can readily be seen that Plato's view of science was *teleological*. He was mainly concerned with the function of natural phenomena.

Very significant is Plato's concept of space, which is the *third* principle of the universe. We have (1) an intelligible pattern, (2) a created copy, and (3) space, the "receptacle of all generation."<sup>13</sup> Space itself is formless. Nevertheless, it has the potentiality of receiving Forms. It provides a home for all created things. It cannot be perceived by sense, but by a kind of "spurious reason."<sup>14</sup>

This use of the concept of space is noteworthy. *Plato identified space with the principle of Not-being*. Since space is eternal, it confronted God in the very beginning of creation. It was God's task to create order out of chaos. Physical space or physical matter is responsible, to a great extent, for the existence of evil; somehow it resists the rational tendencies of the Forms. Plato, however, never gave a completely definite answer to the problem of evil. In the *Laws* he suggested that evil may be due to the existence of a wicked world-soul which might be compared to a devil.

In Plato, we already have the dualism which became so dominant in medieval philosophy. On the one hand, we have the perfect realm of the Forms—eternal and immutable. On the other hand, we have the realm of matter, which represents a constant flux and is the source of illusion. Plato distinguished between two causes. One is divine, while the other is necessary. He felt that the necessary cause exists for the sake of the divine. Lower beings, consequently, exist

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>13</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, 49.

<sup>14</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, 52.

for the sake of higher beings. The world cannot be understood according to material principles; its essence must be comprehended in its teleological structure.

In the *Timaeus* we have also a discussion of psychological and physiological factors. We are told that man has two souls: one mortal and the other immortal. Our head is the seat of the immortal soul, while the mortal is lodged in the breast. The mortal soul is constantly exposed to irrational sensations. This theory appears incredible to the modern observer, but, we must remember, the Greeks had not developed a solid foundation for psychology.

In the *Timaeus*, as well as in other later dialogues, there is a tendency to use *mathematics* as the model of the universe. Plato asserted that matter and space are identical. Elements, thus, can be best understood according to their geometric differences, and their forms represent the mathematical structure of the universe. Plato asserted that the solid element is made of cubes. Air is made of octahedrons; water is made of icosahedrons; and fire is made of pyramids. He also maintained that the universe itself was made according to a geometrical model.

In his later philosophy Plato suggested that the highest type of knowledge is contained in mathematics. Arithmetic, then, is the first science. In this idea we can detect the enormous influence of the Pythagoreans on the development of the Platonic system.

In defining Ideas as numbers, Plato's philosophy anticipated some of the conclusions of modern science. Modern scientific progress has come about mainly by the reduction of qualities to their quantitative constituents. Plato, however, was not interested in a functional discussion of mathematics. He thought that mathematics is a symbol of the divine structure of the universe and that reality can be expressed in mathematical terms. The same idea was shared by the continental rationalists of the 17th century who tried to establish a system of metaphysics based on mathematical principles.

Thus ends Plato's search for reality. As he grew older, he became more spiritual and more concerned with the problem of God. But in all his periods he stressed one fundamental fact: reality cannot be found in the realm of phenomena; it lies in a super-sensible world which is eternal, uncorrupted, and immune to change.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Relate the main events in Plato's life.
2. What effect did Socrates have upon Plato?

3. What are the major Platonic writings?
4. Explain Plato's doctrine of Ideas.
5. What does the allegory of the cave imply?
6. How can certainty be reached, according to Plato?
7. How is the doctrine of Ideas criticized in the *Parmenides*?
8. How did Plato view the physical realm?
9. How did Plato defend the doctrine of the immortality of the soul?
10. Explain Plato's concept of creation. Compare it with the Biblical view of creation.
11. What was Plato's view of God? Compare his view with that of Christian theology.
12. Describe Plato's concept of matter.
13. What did Plato mean by the Idea of the Good?
14. Summarize the main contributions of Plato's metaphysical system.

# PLATO'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

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## THE SPARTAN INFLUENCE

To appreciate Plato's social philosophy we must understand its cultural setting. Most of Plato's life was dominated by the conflict which was being waged between Sparta and Athens. Many commentators have pointed out that Plato was greatly influenced by an idealized view of Sparta.

The Spartan state was composed of a small group of citizens and a multitude of serfs, who had scarcely any privileges. The ruling class lived a parasitical existence; its main occupation was warfare. Intellectually the Spartans were vastly inferior to the Athenians, and their education was not concerned with the arts but with training the body.

Spartan discipline was harsh, and its youth had to endure heavy hardships. The Spartan youth was issued only one garment a year; often he was forced to go without food. Always under supervision, he was constantly subject to athletic training and engaged in boxing or other rigorous activities to harden his body. The women underwent as much physical training as the men. Associating freely with men, they were taught how to wrestle and how to become strong physically.

The state controlled almost every activity in Sparta. Marriage and childbearing were not left to the discretion of the individual but were supervised by the authorities of the state. Those who did not marry were subject to fines and social abuse. The Spartan moral ideal was that marriage should produce healthy offspring, and consequently children who were weak and deformed were killed. The Spartans were not guided in their actions by brotherly love or by humanitarian considerations.

Since the Spartan state discouraged luxury, it did not admit gold but used iron as currency. Collectivism was encouraged; the men shared their property and ate in common messes. The citizen could not engage in mercantile trade, and agriculture was therefore the backbone of the state. However, serfs, not citizens, tilled the soil. The Spartan state believed in self-sufficiency, and foreign contact was discouraged. It was a perfect model for the totalitarian rulers of later times.

A conception of Sparta can best be obtained by contrasting it with Athens. While Athens was democratic, interested in culture, and imbued with love for the arts, Sparta was autocratic, self-sufficient, and stressed the virtues of militarism.

In Plato's *Republic* we find, also, emphasis on sharp class division and stress on collectivism. Plato's rulers lived almost like the Spartan citizens. But there is one great difference: Plato believed in the philosopher-king, who rules the state not by the use of military measures but through the exercise of *wisdom*.

It is possible that Plato was also inspired by the rule of Archytas at Tarentum. We know that Archytas used Pythagorean principles in directing the political affairs of his time. Furthermore, Plato cherished the example of Socrates, and we know that Socrates was opposed to unrestrained democracy and believed the state should be ruled by the wisest and the best.

### THE MORAL IDEAL

The influence of Socrates was especially strong in the formation of the Platonic ethical system, for, like Socrates, Plato felt that virtues are not acquired and independent of environment. Virtue is one and the same everywhere. Thus, *Plato rejected the relativism of the Sophists*.

Does goodness lie in pleasure, as the Sophists believed? Plato rejected this view and showed how fleeting and transitory pleasures are. If we believe in pleasures alone, we live animalistic lives. He



indicated how pleasures vary in intensity and duration, and how the sources of pleasure differ. Some people, for example, might spend their lives in pure sensuality, yet this mode of life would not lead to a full and meaningful existence, which can best be achieved through philosophical contemplation.

Furthermore, to appreciate and evaluate pleasure, wisdom is needed. The masses are frequently deluded in searching for *immediate* ends and *immediate* satisfactions. Yet, once attained, these ends and satisfactions become a source of pain. Certainly pleasure cannot be the ultimate standard, for it refers to something beyond itself and demands *intellectual evaluation*.

Plato, however, was not ascetic. He did not favor a monastic existence. As we have seen, he was a man who enjoyed all aspects of life. *Thus he suggested a middle path between hedonism and asceticism.*

Throughout his moral teachings, Plato subordinated the lower parts of man, or his irrational nature, to his higher parts, or rational nature. The higher part is identified with the realm of Ideas; the lower part with that of matter, or Not-being. Also, he divided man's irrational nature into two parts: a noble part, which he found in the heart, and an ignoble part, which he located in the liver. Each part of man has a ruling virtue, he claimed, which corresponds to each part of the soul. Thus we have wisdom, courage, and temperance. The most important and highest virtue is justice, which stands for an *orderly* relationship between the various parts and aspects of our nature.

The four significant virtues in Plato, then, are contained in wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Notice that Plato did not say anything about faith. Later, it will be seen how the medieval Scholastics gave a supernatural foundation to his ethical system by adding faith, hope, and charity.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

In discussing Plato's ethical scheme, close attention must be given to his treatment of love. We find its best exposition in the *Symposium*, where there are two types of love: one, sacred; the other, profane. Aristophanes, who is present in the *Symposium*, tells us in a satirical manner how at first human beings had double features; thus they had two faces, four eyes, and four legs. He says that Zeus, believing man would become too powerful, consequently severed the forms and gave to us our present constitution. This explains why we are

forever in search of consummation, and why physical love is such a strong and impelling motive.

The climactic exposition in the *Symposium* is given by Socrates, who explains that love can be compared with a ladder. Real love, which involves a search for transcendence, is emancipated from all acquisitiveness. We start this process first by love for the physical body, but we realize its imperfection, for we know the beauties of the body do not last long and are impaired by age and external circumstances.

Second, we love all physical loveliness; but again something is lacking, for our mind searches for immaterial entities, and when we become mature we want to go beyond material things.

Third, we love the beauties of the mind and the soul. Now we have achieved a higher state. We have turned away from fleeting and trivial concerns, and we have gone beyond the veil of appearances. Yet we are not completely emancipated from the senses, and we are caught by temporal and spatial limitations. Thus, we finally love the *essence* or Idea of loveliness. This involves complete identification; we are no longer conscious of separateness.

As the *Symposium* describes it: "He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty . . . a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven, or in earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the

notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is."<sup>1</sup>

Such absolute beauty is completely independent of the senses. It cannot be described according to physical models. It is a beauty "which if you once beheld, you would see not to be after the measure of gold, and garments, and fair boys and youths, whose presence now entrances you; and you and many a one would be content to live seeing them only and conversing with them without meat or drink, if that were possible—you only want to look at them and to be with them. But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty—the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life—thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtues to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may."<sup>2</sup>

Such a view of love is truly inspiring. We can think of it only according to the process of artistic creativity, for it is quite certain that when the artist produces his best, he loses consciousness of his surroundings and becomes part of the subject matter with which he is working.

### THE NATURE OF JUSTICE AND THE IDEAL STATE

The *Republic*, in which Plato's political and social ideals are set forth, belongs to the most influential books of all time. It was directed primarily against the view of Thrasymachus, who argued for an autocratic and totalitarian way of life and posed as a realist. Plato, opposed to such a view, represented ethical idealism.

Thrasymachus was certain that "the just is always the loser in comparison with the unjust." First of all, in private contracts, "wherever the unjust is the partner of the just you will find that, when the partnership is dissolved, the unjust man has always more and the just less. Second, in their dealings with the state: when there is an income tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same amount of income; and when there is anything to be received

<sup>1</sup> *Symposium*, 210-211.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-212.

the one gains nothing and the other much. Observe also what happens when they take public office: there is the just man neglecting his affairs and perhaps suffering other losses, and getting nothing out of the public, because he is just; moreover, he is hated by his friends and acquaintances for refusing to serve them in unlawful ways. But all this is reversed in the case of the unjust man."<sup>3</sup>

Thrasymachus proceeded to point out the advantage of *mass injustice*. In tyranny, he asserted, the criminal is the happiest of men, and those who resist because they believe in justice are the unhappiest. If he had lived during the Nazi and Fascist regimes in our time, he could have substantiated his argument by pointing to concentration camps, torture chambers, and other instruments of modern civilization.

Thrasymachus gave a comprehensive view of tyranny, "which by fraud and force takes away the property of others, not little by little but wholesale; comprehending in one, things sacred as well as profane, private and public; for which acts of wrong, if he were detected perpetrating any one of them singly, he would be punished and incur great disgrace—they who do such wrong in particular cases are called robbers of temples and man-stealers and burglars and swindlers and thieves. But when a man besides taking away the money of the citizens has made slaves of them, then, instead of these names of reproach, he is termed happy and blessed, not only by the citizens but by all who hear of his having achieved the consummation of injustice. For mankind censure injustice, fearing that they may be the victims of it and not because they shrink from committing it. And thus, as I have shown, Socrates, injustice, when on a sufficient scale, has more strength and freedom and mastery than justice; and, as I said at first, justice is the interest of the stronger, whereas injustice is a man's own profit and interest."<sup>4</sup>

Opposed to this cynical view, Plato believed that justice does exist, and he proceeded to develop his concept of the utopian state which is based not merely on convention or on a social contract but on metaphysical ideals and purposes. His utopian state avoids the temptations of wealth and of excessive size. It consists of three classes: one which rules, one which defends the state, and one which carries on the economic activities of the community. Naturally, the state is governed by the wisest men, just as the body is dominated by the soul.

<sup>3</sup> *Republic*, I, 343-344.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

But how can such an ideal state be established? Plato was quite certain that it requires *equality* of men and women. However, this view was distasteful to the Athenians, who as a rule thought men superior to women and that it is the function of wives to obey their husbands. According to Plato, however, women can be as intelligent and as capable as men, and sex is no barrier to political wisdom.

But, we must remember, in Plato's period Athenian women had already reached a high status, and the dramas of Aristophanes indicate their rebellion against old traditions. As the Athenians became more cosmopolitan, they naturally retreated from their patriarchal viewpoint and were more ready to accord a higher status to their women.

So far, in the *Republic*, Plato had not been very revolutionary, but his attitude changed when he demanded a type of family relationship in which women and children were to be held collectively. Private property, he advocated, was not to be allowed among the ruling class. This point of view, however, does not imply complete communism, for the common people in his republic were allowed to possess property.

Plato had an elevated concept of eugenics. He advocated that the most intelligent and handsome men marry the most graceful and beautiful women, the marriages to be arranged by the state. Regular mating seasons should take place; men were to marry between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five, women between twenty and forty. Like the Spartans, Plato thought that weak and sickly children should be exposed to the elements and allowed to die, only the strong and beautiful being allowed to survive.

Interestingly enough, these Platonic suggestions were followed by Nazi Germany—not that private property was eliminated, but the Germans under Hitler did away with most of the insane. They surpassed Plato in carrying out a vigorous campaign of elimination against their political opponents.

Plato was very much concerned with the problem of inbreeding, for he realized how possible it is for a parasitical ruling class to arise. He suggested that those children who are incapable, even if they are the descendants of the rulers, be placed in another class, while the brilliant children of the lower classes be admitted to the ranks of the rulers. To avoid discontent, Plato advocated that the citizen should be educated into believing that this system is arranged by divine decree. There should be an official myth, he said, which teaches that God has created three classes of men: the most

important are made of gold—they are to be the rulers; the next class are made of silver—they are to be the soldiers; the third are made of brass and iron—and they are to be the common people. The objection could be made that no one would believe such a myth. Plato provided a ready answer, for he thought that while its acceptance would be difficult in the present generation, education would influence the people to accept the royal lie in later times.

In this view he was again prophetic. It is important to notice how great the influence of mythology is on political thinking. For example, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, propagandists saw to it that the children accepted categorical dogmas. While the older generation frequently rebelled, youth was much more willing to adopt new political concepts.

This subject brings us to Plato's view of education. The ruling class, he advocated, is to be exposed to a rigorous curriculum. It starts with music and gymnastics, both of which are vital subjects; gymnastics for the body and music for the mind. The curriculum also includes arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, and astronomy, to give the student an appreciation of immutable principles. To cap off this study of the sciences, he advocated a course in harmonics, to elevate the mind to a higher esthetic plane.

All this serves merely as a preparation for dialectic or philosophy, which can be appreciated only by the few. According to Plato, by the time the student is thirty-five and has passed extensive tests, he is ready to rule the state according to the immutable principles of justice. For the following fifteen years he will use the principles of wisdom in dealing with political matters, and then he will retire, subject to recall to resume charge of political affairs.

Plato believed in the philosopher-king, and in a famous passage maintained: "Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils,—no, nor the human race, as I believe,—and then only will this our state have a possibility of life and behold the light of day."<sup>5</sup>

Plato asserted that mankind can be saved only if the wisest rule. The Athenian experiment in democracy had convinced him that only too often the state is guided by the mediocre. Wise men, he knew, dislike engaging in political affairs. Thus, he prescribed an

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 473.

exact educational curriculum to prepare the wise for the duties of public office. In Plato's philosophy, *political concepts are identified with ethical ideals*. The ruling class, the philosopher-kings, possess the virtue of wisdom; the soldiers exemplify courage; and the common people, temperance.

It is a mistake to think of Plato as a proponent of war, for he knew that culture can best develop in time of peace. He advocated the humane treatment of prisoners and was very much concerned with the disintegration of the Hellenic states. Like Gorgias, he believed in real Pan-Hellenic unity.

Most interesting is Plato's suggestion of censorship. Like Xenophanes, Plato turned against the poets, whom he excluded from the ideal republic. Having read Homer and Hesiod carefully, he decided he had no use for them. Had not both of them pictured the gods as behaving in a thoroughly immoral manner? Did they not talk about the gods as being swept away by passions? Moreover, these poets did not stress the dignity of the gods; thereby they created a poor example for youth. Homer frequently showed that the wicked live a happy life and the virtuous suffer on earth. This situation was unedifying from Plato's moral standpoint, and the students of the ideal utopia were to be taught that virtue always wins and vice is inevitably punished.

In discussing the drama Plato inveighed against all plays which stress badness or portray the pleasures of immorality. Such dramas are not to be allowed, for no evil acts are to be imitated. He thought such imitation spoils the character of the actors. In fact, Plato believed that the disintegration of Athens, to some extent, was due to the laxity of its poets and dramatists.

In his esthetic theory, Plato made it clear that all art is second-rate. As an imitation of phenomena art cannot give us reality. It is so dangerous that it must be strictly censored. Art, in short, must edify and teach a moral lesson. This censorship is even extended to music. Plato wanted to outlaw the enervating rhythms of the Lydian and Ionian modes. In their stead, he advocated the use of the Dorian and Phrygian modes, because they can inspire an attitude of courage and temperance. He thought music should be *simple*; hence, he did not favor "complex" harmony.

In the tenth book of the *Republic*, Plato returned to the attack against the poets. Socrates tells Glaucon: "Whenever you meet with any of the eulogists of Homer declaring that he has been the educator of Hellas, and that he is profitable for education and for the

ordering of human things, and that you should take him up again and again and yet again to know him and regulate your whole life according to him, we may love and honor those who say these things—they are excellent people, as far as their lights extend; and we are ready to acknowledge that Homer is the greatest of poets and first of tragedy writers; but we must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our state. For if you go beyond this and allow the honeyed muse to enter, either in epic or lyric verse, pleasure and pain will be the lords of your state.”<sup>6</sup>

In the *Republic*, Plato indicates that the ideal state can easily disintegrate. The first stage of disintegration he calls *timocracy*, which stands for government by ambition instead of wisdom. The ruling goal is worldly power, and consequently the harmony to be found in a utopia is absent.

The second stage of decline is *oligarchy*, the rule of the rich. Now money is all-important, and material goals are worshiped. This situation brings about a conflict between the rich and the poor, with political affairs being dominated by those who have the most money and are able to bribe the politicians.

Such a form of government is still to be preferred to the third type, *democracy*. In this stage, complete chaos prevails. No attention is paid to law and order; individualism runs rampant. Plato, here, was referring to Athenian democracy, which very often disintegrated and led to anarchy.

But the fourth stage, *tyranny*, is even more unpleasant, for the tyrant is guided by the worst of impulses. Plato shows how tyranny leads to war, how the wisest and best people are eliminated under tyranny, and how unscrupulous politicians are supreme in this form of government. Since the tyrant is like a wild beast, his passions can never be completely satisfied. Of all men, the tyrant is the most despicable:

“He who is the real tyrant, whatever men may think, is the real slave, and is obliged to practice the greatest adulation and servility, and to be the flatterer of the vilest of mankind. He has desires which he is utterly unable to satisfy, and has more wants than any one, and is truly poor, if you know how to inspect the whole soul of him: all his life long he is beset with fear and is full of convulsions and distractions, even as the state which he resembles: and surely the resemblance holds? . . .

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 606–607.



"Moreover, as we were saying before, he grows worse from having power: he becomes and is of necessity more jealous, more faithless, more unjust, more friendless, more impious, than he was at first; he is the purveyor and cherisher of every sort of vice, and the consequence is that he is supremely miserable, and that he makes everybody else as miserable as himself."<sup>7</sup>

### THE THEOCRATIC IDEAL

In his later years Plato became increasingly conservative. His own experiences at Syracuse had convinced him that it was almost impossible to develop a philosopher-king. Consequently he was especially concerned with the supremacy of laws, and in the *Statesman* he gave up his utopian idealism. In the *Statesman* he divided governments according to their adherence to laws. Thus, there are three types of lawful government: first, monarchy; second, aristocracy; third, constitutional democracy. Democracy, in this scheme, is the worst; monarchy, the best.

Also, he spoke of three *lawless* types of government: first, tyranny; second, oligarchy; third, lawless democracy. In this scheme lawless democracy is the best and tyranny the worst. Plato thought that in lawless democracy there is less oppression than in tyranny, in which a completely arbitrary rule prevails.

In this treatise Plato stressed the art of government, which he thought could not be mastered by the masses. Since he believed in expert preparation, he felt it ridiculous that political affairs were frequently entrusted to the most ignorant politicians.

In the *Laws*, Plato in his discussion of politics became almost reactionary. He suggested a theocratic government and was quite ruthless when he dealt with those who are opposed to such a state. He maintained that the decline of Athens was due mainly to the decay of morals. He contrasted this condition with early times, in which an idyllic life prevailed:

"And then, as time went on, the poets themselves introduced the reign of vulgar and lawless innovation. They were men of genius, but they had no perception of what is just and lawful in music; raging like Bacchanals and possessed with inordinate delights—mingling lamentations with hymns, and paeans with dithyrambs; imitating the sounds of the flute on the lyre, and making one general confusion; ignorantly affirming that music has no truth, and, whether good or bad, can only be judged of rightly by the pleasure

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 579-580.

of the hearer. And by composing such licentious works, and adding to them words as licentious, they have inspired the multitude with lawlessness and boldness, and made them fancy that they can judge for themselves about melody and song. And in this way the theaters from being mute have become vocal, as though they had understanding of good and bad in music and poetry; and instead of an aristocracy, an evil sort of theatrocracy has grown up. For if the democracy which judged had consisted only of educated persons, no fatal harm would have been done; but in music there first arose the universal conceit of omniscience and general lawlessness;—freedom followed afterwards, and men, fancying that they knew what they did not know, had no longer any fear, and the absence of fear begets shamelessness. For what is this shamelessness, which is so evil a thing, but the insolent refusal to regard the opinion of the better by reason of an over-daring sort of liberty?"<sup>8</sup>

Noteworthy in Plato's discussion of the *Laws* is his doctrine of economics. He makes it clear that the acquisitive instinct should not be promoted. Like the Spartans, he believed that no luxury goods should be allowed. He gives some shrewd advice regarding the treatment of slaves, who are not to be treated too familiarly. At the same time, the dictates of justice should prevail in our relationship with them.

In his discussion of education, he starts by proposing proper care for expectant mothers. He recommends that babies should not be frightened by loud noises, and that children not be told about monsters and other unnatural creatures. Their games should be standardized so that the spirit of rebellion cannot emerge. The climax of education should be the study of astronomy, not dialectic, as was recommended in the *Republic*.

Since Plato was especially concerned with the treatment of older people, he thought it the task of children to take care of their parents. If they do not, the state should intervene and punish those who neglect their family duties.

His concept of sex, in the *Laws*, is puritanical. He inveighs against the prevailing practice of close friendship among men. The aim of love, he felt, is procreation, not the happiness of the individual. He stresses the importance of virginity before marriage and recommends that adultery be strictly punished. The ideal of continence is to be encouraged by physical exercises and by sound educational instruction.

<sup>8</sup> *Laws*, IV, 700-701.

In his legal philosophy Plato recommended five types of punishment: (1) degrading exposure; (2) corporal punishment; (3) imprisonment; (4) segregation; (5) death. The last penalty is to be applied in cases of sedition, sacrilege, and homicide, and in certain cases of atheism. Generally, he advocated that punishments be corrective; but the spirit of his discussion indicates that his main purpose was to ostracize the criminals. He was especially severe with lawyers who did not adhere to the spirit of truth; here he was probably thinking of the Sophists.

In international relations he adopted Spartan ideals. Like the Spartans, he thought it best if the city-states were isolated, maintaining little contact with other states. Foreign traders were to be kept apart, and visitors who came from abroad to attend the festivals were to be allowed to stay for only a limited time.

The rulers of the state, he maintained, should be especially versed in religion. They should accept the existence of absolute moral laws and believe in the immortality of the soul. They are to be experts in astronomy, which will endow them with a knowledge of the immutable laws of the universe.

In this theocratic government, God is the head of the state, which is guided by a corps of examiners who have power to remove any magistrate. Also, there is a nocturnal council, charged with upholding the laws. This council is composed of ten guardians who are advanced in wisdom and age, and ten younger men, nominated by these elders. Thus, Plato thought, the state will be ruled by a combination of youth and age, making for stability and security in government.

### THE INFLUENCE OF PLATO

Plato's influence on later times has been so immense that it is impossible to do justice to it. Seeds of his political ideas can be seen in the Middle Ages, when sharp class divisions flourished. The three main classes were: the rulers—kings and priests; the soldiers—knights; and the common people—serfs. The Catholic Church, in its organization, embodies to some extent the hierarchical ideas of Plato. Calvin's theocracy at Geneva affirmed that God is supreme and the function of the state is to enforce the laws of theology.

The leadership principle of National Socialism in Germany, the new concepts of eugenics, the place of the elite in Mussolini's Italy, the status of the Communist Party in Russia—all these indicate a strain of Platonism.

Furthermore, Plato inspired a multitude of utopias. We can mention only a few, such as More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *City of the sun*, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and Bellamy's *Looking backward*. His ideal that philosophers should be kings is reflected in some ways in the formation of UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

In many ways his metaphysical influence was even more marked than his political impact. Platonism contributed to the dualistic movement in ancient thought, especially in Philo, Neo-Pythagoreanism, and Neo-Platonism. The Platonic philosophy inspired Augustine and gave him the substance of his beliefs.

During the Renaissance Platonism was in the foreground of the reaction against Aristotelian thinking, and it led the protest against all types of naturalism. Modern idealists, especially Descartes, Malebranche, Emerson, and Royce, all owe a tremendous debt to Plato's philosophy.

#### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did Sparta influence Plato's utopia?
2. Discuss the weaknesses of the Spartan state.
3. What did Plato think of democracy? What would be his opinion of American government?
4. What is the ideal government, according to Plato's *Republic*?
5. What function do the philosophers have in Plato's *Republic*?
6. Why did Plato believe in eugenics? What is your own view of eugenics?
7. How did Plato regard atheism in the *Laws*?
8. How did Plato attempt to reform education?
9. Discuss the ways in which Platonic concepts have influenced modern political movements.

# ARISTOTLE'S SCIENTIFIC AND METAPHYSICAL THEORIES

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## PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

**I**n turning to the philosophy of Aristotle, we note a pronounced difference from the philosophy of Plato. What strikes us immediately is the more sober approach, for Aristotle wrote like a college professor—systematically, with a proclivity for definition and a love for order. Plato, on the other hand, best represents the poetic spirit. In him philosophy was truly literary; frequently he used mythology and allegory to illustrate his points. In Plato the religious spirit is quite evident, and his doctrine of reincarnation indicates his connection with the Orphic Mysteries. In Aristotle, however, religion is subordinated to science; and, unlike Plato, he was interested in *biology* rather than in mathematics.

Aristotle represents the climax of Greek philosophy. Probably no one surpassed him in intellectual versatility and power of synthesis. We owe to him much of our knowledge of earlier Greek philosophy, for he was not merely a speculative thinker but also a compiler

and historian. While he did not always state the opinions of his predecessors too objectively, it must be remembered that he was frequently carried away by the heat of the argument and his own philosophical convictions. In philosophical disputes objectivity very frequently is lacking. This is true not only in ancient times, for example, in the disputes between Plato and the Sophists, and between Aristotle and Plato, but in modern times, as in the disputes between Descartes and Hobbes, Schopenhauer and Hegel, and James and Royce.

What is most admirable about Aristotle is his intellectual balance; there was little emotionalism in his character. He appears to us mainly as a bystander, immensely inquisitive, incessantly industrious, with interest in all the varied aspects of life.

Aristotle became a universal man. In the history of civilization his variety of interests has, perhaps, been equaled only by Sir Francis Bacon, Leonardo, Goethe, and Spencer. But he surpassed almost all these later thinkers in the scope of his investigations and in his influence on succeeding generations. The accomplishments of Aristotle in the field of science were as significant as his contributions to ethics, esthetics, and politics. As can readily be seen, he was interested both in an understanding of reality and in a description of the universe.

In his many-sided genius, Aristotle is an excellent representative of the Greek spirit. His stress on reason, his faith in moderation, his appreciation of external goods, his love for compromise—all these traits were part of the Greek ideal of life. Modern thinkers may have a more adequate scientific background than Aristotle, but they seldom achieve his objectivity and intellectual balance.

We may now ask why Aristotle has had such a firm hold upon the human mind. First, his theories could be readily adapted by various ecclesiastical organizations; therefore his philosophy became the virtual foundation of philosophical Catholicism, philosophical Judaism, and medieval Mohammedanism. In his emphasis on cosmic purposes, he gave a spiritual interpretation of the universe, and in his attempt to picture the world as a hierarchy he almost anticipated medieval Scholasticism.

Second, Aristotle spoke with *authority*. His opinions were not expressed as hypotheses but as authoritative conclusions. It appears that mankind is inevitably impressed by definite, categorical affirmation. He gave a complete analysis of the various sciences, leaving almost no field untouched and very few questions unanswered.

Third, the Aristotelian philosophy is *geocentric*. It stresses the importance of man and the potentialities of man's reason. It flatters human pretensions and human ideals. Modern science, on the other hand, has dehumanized the universe and shown how infinitesimal man's status is. Naturally, such a view is distasteful to the average man and must struggle assiduously against the Aristotelian view, which is antimechanistic and *teleological*.

### LIFE AND TIME OF ARISTOTLE

Aristotle's father was court physician to the Macedonian king Amyntas, the grandfather of Alexander. His family had long been interested in medicine, and this scientific leaning probably had a powerful influence on him.

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. in Stagira, a town in Thrace. His parents died when he was young, and he was brought up by Proxenus, who provided him with an excellent education. When he was eighteen years old he was sent to Athens, where he entered Plato's Academy. It was the custom in those times for people, if they could afford it, to send their sons to distant centers of learning. The Platonic Academy had already achieved a wide reputation and was regarded as an excellent school, not only for preparation in politics but also for scientific studies.

This removal to Athens marked an important step for Aristotle. Macedonia, it must be remembered, was not as cultured as Athens, although its ruling class was of Hellenic stock and claimed to be related to the ruling house of Argos. The common people of Macedonia did not speak pure Greek. Generally unrefined, they lacked the advantages of city life. No wonder that the more sophisticated Athenians looked upon them as barbarians! At the Academy, however, Aristotle did not lag behind and soon gained a reputation as a brilliant student. He studied there until he was thirty-five. When he finished, he had surpassed almost all the disciples of Plato.

It is quite certain that at the Academy Aristotle's interests were mainly along metaphysical lines. Scientific studies alone were inadequate for him; his early treatises, especially the *Protrepticus*, definitely exhibit the Platonic spirit. But later he transcended the Platonic influence and became independent in his speculations regarding the nature of reality.

In ancient times much gossip arose regarding the alleged estrangement between Plato and Aristotle. That there was such an estrangement, however, does not seem to be based upon factual evidence.

Aristotle was conscious of the debt he owed his master. His attacks were rather directed against the shallow interpreters of Plato, especially Speusippus, whom he regarded as extremely mediocre. The followers of Plato adopted an ontological interpretation of the Ideas, a view which intensely displeased Aristotle.

We must not think of Aristotle as an isolated scholar, interested merely in research. We are told that he was extremely vain about his personal appearance and wore clothes of the latest fashion. As a sophisticated man of the world, he could converse on equal terms with the rulers of his time. After the death of Plato, Aristotle was invited to the court of Hermeias, ruler of Atarneus and Mytilene, who was somewhat of a philosopher and had studied at Plato's Academy. The relationship between him and Aristotle was excellent, and Aristotle married one of his close relatives.

An important event took place in Aristotle's life in 343 B.C., when he was invited by Philip to become the tutor of his son Alexander. Philip of Macedonia, an excellent diplomat and an eminent general, laid the foundation for the rise of Macedonian power. A master in the art of strategy, he gradually consolidated his power until he gained dominance over all Greece. His work has been compared with that of czar Peter of Russia; and, like the latter, Philip was determined to unify and civilize his state. He cherished the ideal of Pan-Hellenic unity; and in 338 B.C., at the congress of Corinth, he drafted a constitution which united the Greek states under Macedonian leadership. He was assassinated while planning an expedition against Persia and was succeeded by his son Alexander.

As tutor of Alexander, Aristotle had great influence on the course of world history; not that Alexander accepted all the ideas and plans of his teacher, for he was self-willed and obstinate. Still, Alexander represented the ideals of high-mindedness and genuine statesmanship which Aristotle preached. But this fact must not be overlooked: there was a significant spiritual difference between the two. Aristotle felt only contempt for the barbarians—for those who did not share the blessings of Greek civilization. However, it was the ambition and aspiration of Alexander to unite Hellenic with Oriental civilization. If he had succeeded permanently, history might have taken a different turn, and the clashes between East and West might have been avoided. In this respect, at least, Alexander had a more penetrating vision than his teacher.

Between 340 and 335 B.C. Aristotle was mostly engaged in scientific research at Stagira, where he was aided by Theophrastus, who



later succeeded him at his school in Athens. Constantly his research was aided by liberal grants from Alexander, who, in this manner, contributed to scientific and philosophic progress.

When Alexander embarked upon his conquest of Asia, in 334 B.C., Aristotle returned to Athens. This time he went as a teacher, however, not as a student, and he established a new school called the Lyceum, named after Apollo Lyceus. There was vigorous competition between the Lyceum and the Academy, and very soon Aristotle's school surpassed Plato's. This supremacy was due mainly to the comprehensive and stimulating lectures of Aristotle, who not only taught the principles of science but also gave instruction in politics, rhetoric, and dialectic.

Despite his success in the educational field, Aristotle's position in Athens was insecure, as he was a foreigner and Alexander's friend, and there was much resentment against the Macedonian ruler. The popular prejudice was especially intensified by the efforts of Demosthenes, Alexander's implacable opponent. At the same time, Aristotle was losing favor with Alexander, who in his last years was adopting Oriental customs and the Oriental way of life. All these, Aristotle thought, would only lead to decadence and to the disintegration of the Greek spirit, and he protested openly to Alexander.

When Alexander died suddenly, in 323 B.C., there were rumors that Aristotle or Antipater had poisoned him. These rumors, however, were unfounded, for it appears certain that he died of natural causes. As soon as the news of his death spread, open rebellion broke out in many parts of Greece. The anti-Macedonian faction regarded Aristotle as a subversive influence, and so he thought it wise to leave Athens. He was accused, also, of atheism; and since he did not wish to become a martyr, he went to Chalcis, where he died in 322 B.C.

## THE WORKS OF ARISTOTLE

Unfortunately many of the works of Aristotle have been lost. Still, what remains of his researches is quite bulky and gives evidence of his indefatigable labors. His logical treatises are called the *Organon*. They consist of the *Categories*, which are especially occupied with the discussion of substance and name the eight categories of thought. Then there is his book *On interpretation*, which discusses the various types of propositions. The *Prior analytics* is occupied especially with the syllogism; in it we find the rules for the categorical

syllogism and the concept of induction. The *Posterior analytics* deals with scientific demonstrations and the nature of scientific knowledge. The *Topics* deals with dialectical reasoning, and a special section is devoted to ambiguous meanings. Another part of his logical work is *On sophistical refutations*, which exposes the verbal and logical fallacies of the Sophists and makes a distinction between genuine and apparent reasoning.

Aristotle's main work in the field of physical science is the *Physics* (*Physica*). It discusses such topics as the conditions of change and the problem of teleology, and it takes up philosophical concepts such as motion, time, space, the void, and the infinite. Another significant treatise in physical science is *On the heavens* (*De caelo*). It deals with the nature of heaven and compares it with the elements of the earth. Special sections in this treatise are devoted to a discussion of motion and the properties of the various elements.

We must not omit Aristotle's other contributions to physical science, especially his book *On generation and corruption*, which is concerned with the problem of alteration and the basic elements of the universe. He is critical in this work regarding the theory of Empedocles, who believed that the four elements could not be transformed into one another. Another treatise in physical science is entitled the *Meteorology* (*Meteorologica*), and it deals with the realm between heaven and earth and also contains some elementary psychological theories. It discusses the nature of comets, planets, and meteors; and it had considerable influence on scientific developments in the Middle Ages.

Turning to the biological sciences, we find his treatise *On the soul* (*De anima*). In this field we also find the *Short physical treatises* (*Parva naturalia*), which discusses such topics as memory, reminiscence, and the significance of dreams. More important is his discussion of animals in *On the parts of animals*, which among other topics contains his observations on the methods of natural science, his theory of classification, and his views on animal structure. Another treatise in biology deals with concepts of sexual generation. They are portrayed in *On the generation of animals* (*Historia animalium*), in which the physiology of animals is discussed as well as various views on generation. In all these treatises a great deal of repetition prevails. As a model teacher Aristotle realized that important points must be stressed repeatedly if they are to be understood.

Undoubtedly Aristotle's most influential book is the *Metaphysics* (*Metaphysica*). Its title was probably derived from the fact that it follows the physical treatises in the collection of the Aristotelian works which were edited by Andronicus of Rhodes. Some of the problems of the *Metaphysics* deal with Aristotle's definitions of philosophical terms and his criticism of earlier philosophers, especially Plato. He made a distinction between actuality and potentiality, and in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* he discusses the nature and function of the Prime Mover.

In the field of ethics, we have the *Nicomachean ethics*, dealing with the various types of virtues, continence, pleasure, friendship, and happiness. The ethical views of Aristotle are distinguished by his concept of the Golden Mean and by his faith in the power of reason and the validity of intellectual virtues. The *Eudemian ethics* also vividly portrays the spirit of Aristotelian moral ideals.

In the field of political science Aristotle's *Politics* is especially important. Under this heading he discusses not merely the problems of statesmanship but also the goals and function of education. The tenor of his political observations is extremely realistic, and to some extent there are in them Machiavellian strains.

In the field of rhetoric and literary criticism, Aristotle likewise made far-reaching contributions. In the *Rhetoric* (*Rhetorica*) he gives a systematic treatment of this subject. His observations regarding style and the forms of speech are as valid today as they were in his own time.

In the *Poetics* (*De poetica*) we have the Aristotelian views regarding tragedy, epic poetry, and comedy. Through these studies Aristotle became the founder of literary criticism, and even today we hear much concerning his definition of tragedy and his insistence on the three unities of plot, time, and place.

In observing his works from a broad perspective, we are awed by the breadth and scope of his researches. His power of unification, his ability to synthesize, his immense depth—all these traits have seldom been duplicated in philosophy. Thus we can understand why a modern thinker like Santayana believed that almost all of subsequent thinking is a mere footnote to the system of Aristotle.

## THE DIVISION OF ARISTOTLE'S PHILOSOPHY

The development of philosophy was aided greatly by Aristotle's talent for classification. Unlike Plato, he was concerned with

specific as well as universal facts. Indeed, Aristotle started with *particular phenomena* and then arrived at a universal conclusion. Induction arrives at a generalization through an enumeration of particular facts, whereas deduction starts with a universal premise and then derives from it a specific conclusion.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle devoted much space to natural science in his philosophy. Yet he was not concerned exclusively with an observation of the phenomena of nature, for he believed that the highest and most important science is *metaphysics, the study of immaterial being*. This viewpoint is extremely significant. It established the tone of much of later philosophical speculation, for Aristotle emphasized that the practical sciences are to be subordinated to the theoretical sciences. The material is to be followed by the immaterial. Thus, philosophers throughout medieval and early modern times were more concerned with theory than with practice and frequently had a dislike for the realm of action and concrete fact.

In making metaphysics the climax of all knowledge, Aristotle gave emphasis to the importance of immaterial truths. This love for metaphysics has never disappeared in philosophy; and although various movements have arisen in modern times, such as positivism and dialectical materialism, which protest against metaphysics, it is still regarded with respect and admiration by most professional philosophers.

Returning to Aristotle's definition of philosophy, we find that he regarded logic as a preparatory science to philosophical thinking. Thus we have theoretical philosophy, which includes three subjects: metaphysics, physics, and mathematics. Theoretical philosophy is followed by practical philosophy, which contains politics and ethics. Last, we find poetical philosophy, which contains his theory of art, especially poetry.

In the first book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle indicates that all men are inquisitive animals and by nature desire to know. "An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.

"By nature animals are born with the faculty of sensation, and from sensation memory is produced in some of them, though not

in others. And therefore the former are more intelligent and apt at learning than those which cannot remember; those which are incapable of hearing sounds are intelligent though they cannot be taught, *e.g.*, the bee, and any other race of animals that may be like it; and those which besides memory have this sense of hearing can be taught.

"The animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings."<sup>1</sup>

The philosopher, above all, is interested in a rational explanation of the universe. This fact means that he deals with first causes and the principles of things. All this demands wisdom:

"We suppose first, then, that the wise man knows all things, as far as possible, although he has not knowledge of each of them in detail; secondly that he who can learn things that are difficult, and not easy for man to know, is wise (sense-perception is common to all, and therefore easy and no mark of wisdom); again, that he who is more exact and more capable of teaching the causes is wiser, in every branch of knowledge; and that of the sciences, also, that which is desirable on its own account and for the sake of knowing it is more of the nature of wisdom than that which is desirable on account of its results, and the superior science is more of the nature of wisdom than the ancillary; for the wise man must not be ordered but must order, and he must not obey another, but the less wise must obey *him*."<sup>2</sup>

Such wisdom, however, is not concerned with specific facts but with *universal* knowledge. Aristotle shows that universal ideas are more difficult for men to grasp, since they are far-removed from the senses: "And the most exact of the sciences are those which deal most with first principles; for those which involve fewer principles are more exact than those which involve additional principles, *e.g.*, arithmetic than geometry. But the science which investigates causes is also *instructive*, in a higher degree, for the people who instruct us are those who tell the causes of each thing. And understanding and knowledge pursued for their own sake are found most in the knowledge of that which is most knowable (for he who chooses to know for the sake of knowing will choose most readily that which is most truly knowledge, and such is the knowledge of that which is most knowable); and the first principles and the causes are most know-

<sup>1</sup> *Metaphysics*, I, 980 a.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 982 a.

able; for by reason of these, and from these, all other things come to be known, and not these by means of the things subordinate to them. And the science which knows to what end each thing must be done is the most authoritative of the sciences, and more authoritative than any ancillary science; and this end is the good of that thing, and in general the supreme good in the whole of nature. Judged by all the tests we have mentioned, then, the name in question falls to the same science; this must be a science that investigates the first principles and causes; for the good, *i.e.*, the end, is one of the causes.”<sup>3</sup>

Aristotle explains that philosophy is not a utilitarian subject. It is connected with our sense of wonder: “For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties about the greater matters, *e.g.*, about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe.”<sup>4</sup>

This view of philosophy almost establishes kinship with the gods: “Hence also the possession of it might be justly regarded as beyond human power; for in many ways human nature is in bondage, so that according to Simonides ‘God alone can have this privilege,’ and it is unfitting that man should not be content to seek the knowledge that is suited to him. If, then, there is something in what the poets say, and jealousy is natural to the divine power, it would probably occur in this case above all, and all who excelled in this knowledge would be unfortunate. But the divine power cannot be jealous (nay, according to the proverb, ‘bards tell many a lie’), nor should any other science be thought more honorable than one of this sort. For the most divine science is also most honorable; and this science alone must be, in two ways, most divine. For the science which it would be most meet for God to have is a divine science, and so is any science that deals with divine objects; and this science alone has both these qualities; for (1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others. All the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than this, but none is better.”<sup>5</sup>

Notice how firmly Aristotle stressed the importance of *speculation*. Emphasizing the validity of reason, he felt that only by the exercise of this capacity can man realize his destiny and understand the principles of reality. He was not satisfied until he had reached a

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 982 a-b.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 982 b.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 982 b-983 a.

comprehensive outline of the universe. Seldom has a philosopher had such faith in man's rational capacity.

### ARISTOTLE'S LOGICAL THEORIES

The logical theories of Aristotle indicate the enormous extent of his influence. Even today much of the college teaching in logic is concerned with the Aristotelian syllogism. In Catholic schools it forms almost the center of the curriculum. Pragmatists and humanists, on the other hand, assert that Aristotle's logic is completely outmoded and that, instead, we should study the relationship of logic to psychology and deal especially with the science of semantics, which is concerned with linguistic pitfalls. The attack against Aristotle is especially sharp on the part of John Dewey, in his *Logic*, and in Schiller's *Logic for use*, which gives a humanistic account of the function and nature of logic.

Let us objectively and briefly review some of the important elements of Aristotelian logic. We note at the outset that Aristotle stresses the importance of the categories. These, the highest classes into which all concepts can be divided, are the immediate and unanalyzable constituents of thought. We cannot depart from them in making any kind of judgment about the external world.

Aristotle, however, varies in specifying the number of categories. At first he mentions only eight, and later ten categories. The following is a list of the categories:

- Substance
- Quantity
- Quality
- Relation
- Place
- Time
- Action
- Passivity

To this list he added State and Position.

Aristotle's concept of the categories, it should be noted, is based mainly on grammatical distinctions. He was attempting to show that in making any kind of intellectual assertion we are dependent upon fundamental intellectual concepts. His preoccupation with the categories had a decided impact on the history of philosophy. For example, in German Idealism we find that the categories are regarded as *a priori*; their deduction, according to Kant, is one of the fundamental tasks of philosophy.

In his discussion of the categories, Aristotle devoted much space to *substance*. As the most important and fundamental category, it is basic to all reasoning. With emphasis he points out that substance stands, above all, for an individual thing. Thus he is distinguished from Plato, who believed universals to be real. At the same time, Aristotle used substance in another way:

"All substance appears to signify that which is individual. In the case of primary substance this is indisputably true, for the thing is a unit. In the case of secondary substances, when we speak, for instance, of 'man' or 'animal,' our form of speech gives the impression that we are here also indicating that which is individual, but the impression is not strictly true; for a secondary substance is not an individual, but a class with a certain qualification; for it is not one and single as a primary substance is; the words 'man,' 'animal,' are predicable of more than one subject.

"Yet species and genus do not merely indicate quality, like the term 'white'; 'white' indicates quality and nothing further, but species and genus determine the quality with reference to a substance: they signify substance qualitatively differentiated. The determinate qualification covers a larger field in the case of the genus than in that of the species: he who uses the word 'animal' is herein using a word of wider extension than he who uses the word 'man.'" <sup>6</sup>

Aristotle catalogued the common characteristics of all substances. He showed that a common trait of all substance is that it is never present in a subject: "For primary substance is neither present in a subject nor predicated of a subject; while, with regard to secondary substances, it is clear from the following arguments (apart from others) that they are not present in a subject. For 'man' is predicated of the individual man, but is not present in any subject: for manhood is not present in the individual man. In the same way, 'animal' is also predicated of the individual man, but is not present in him. Again, when a thing is present in a subject, though the name may quite well be applied to that in which it is present, the definition cannot be applied. Yet of secondary substances, not only the name, but also the definition applies to the subject: we should use both the definition of the species and that of the genus with reference to the individual man. Thus substance cannot be present in a subject." <sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Categories*, 3 b.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 a.



Furthermore, substance has no contrary: "What could be the contrary of any primary substance, such as the individual man or animal? It has none. Nor can the species or the genus have a contrary. Yet this characteristic is not peculiar to substance, but is true of many other things, such as quantity. There is nothing that forms the contrary of 'two cubits long' or of 'three cubits long,' or of 'ten,' or of any such term. A man may contend that 'much' is the contrary of 'little,' or 'great' of 'small,' but of definite quantitative terms no contrary exists."<sup>8</sup>

Nor does substance admit of variation of degree: "Substance, again, does not appear to admit of variation of degree. I do not mean by this that one substance cannot be more or less truly substance than another, for it has already been stated that this is the case; but that no single substance admits of varying degrees within itself. For instance, one particular substance, 'man,' cannot be more or less man either than himself at some other time or than some other man. One man cannot be more man than another, as that which is white may be more or less white than some other white object, or as that which is beautiful may be more or less beautiful than some other beautiful object. The same quality, moreover, is said to subsist in a thing in varying degrees at different times. A body, being white, is said to be whiter at one time than it was before, or, being warm, is said to be warmer or less warm than at some other time. But substance is not said to be more or less that which it is: a man is not more truly a man at one time than he was before, nor is anything, if it is substance, more or less what it is. Substance, then, does not admit of variation of degree."<sup>9</sup>

Besides his treatment of the categories, Aristotle's concept of definition is extremely significant. A definition, he held, should describe the essential characteristics of the phenomenon which is to be defined. Here he turned against the Sophists, who had deluded their followers by frequently giving superficial definitions. Furthermore, he pointed out, a definition should not be circular. This statement implies that a definition should not contain the subject to be defined. Thus, if we want to define democracy, we should not say that it is a government in which a democratic principle prevails. Moreover, Aristotle asserted that a definition should be neither too broad nor too narrow; nor should it be stated in negative language. Again using the example of democracy, it would be a mistake to

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 b.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 b-4 a.

say that democracy is a form of government in which coercion does not prevail, since we have introduced a *negative* term.

In his concept of definition Aristotle was concerned primarily with essential characteristics. Much loose thinking prevails, he thought, because frequently no exact distinction is made between essential properties and accidental facts. It should be noted that his concept of knowledge is eminently *systematic*. According to him, the sciences can be organized so that complete coherence prevails, starting with elementary facts and reaching a climax with a consideration of immaterial Being.

Aristotle realized that if the sciences were to progress, methodology was absolutely necessary. The pre-Socratic philosophers generally had no clear concept of logical order; hence much confusion prevailed in their theories. In Aristotle, however, the ideal of consistency prevails, and all reasoning is subjected to stringent logical requirements.

The fundamental logical unit, Aristotle asserted, is the *sylogism*. An example of the Aristotelian syllogism is the following:

All Nazis were anti-Semitic.

Hitler was a Nazi.

Therefore, Hitler was anti-Semitic.

The first proposition constitutes the major premise. The second, the minor premise; and the conclusion is contained in the statement, "Hitler was anti-Semitic." Aristotle demonstrated how various forms of the syllogism could be obtained. The syllogism itself, he believed, is based on the law of self-contradiction and the law of excluded middle.

To some extent, as Bertrand Russell has often pointed out, Aristotle had too much faith in the syllogism, for he held that all deductive arguments can be reduced to the syllogism. Yet mathematics, which is based on deduction, can get along very well without the use of the syllogism. Furthermore, the syllogism is not helpful when it becomes necessary to discover new truths. It merely describes the relationship between propositions. Thus, *a syllogism can be valid regardless of the truth of its assertion*. For example, we might say: "All Germans are warmongers. Fritz Schmidt is a German. Therefore, Fritz Schmidt is a warmonger." From a formal standpoint, the argument is perfectly valid although its truth can scarcely be maintained.

In the Middle Ages, the syllogistic form of argument was extremely popular. This popularity led to great intellectual confusion,

for it was thought that the main task of the thinker is to draw valid conclusions from universal premises. When Copernicus, Galileo, and Brahe challenged the Aristotelian concept of nature, their opponents frequently resorted to syllogistic arguments and showed by logical devices that the heliocentric theory could not possibly be true. This sort of argument, however, was not due so much to Aristotle as to the enthusiasm of his disciples, who were, largely, more interested in abstract speculation than in a realistic description of nature.

Scientific demonstration was discussed most fully by Aristotle in his *Posterior analytics*. Science, Aristotle asserted, is concerned with the universal causes of things. Using the resources of both induction and deduction, science has not merely a descriptive function but also an explanatory significance. Science inevitably asks why phenomena occur, and ultimately it arrives at an all-inclusive definition.

It should be noted that Aristotle, in his concept of science, was more concerned with explanation than with control and experimentation. Our modern ideal of science opposes this standpoint, for we believe in a *concrete* application of scientific knowledge. We assume that our knowledge of phenomena is tentative and must constantly be checked by experiments and hypotheses. Thus, the modern ideal of science aims at control over nature, whereas the Aristotelian ideal of science aimed at a *rational understanding of nature*.

Aristotle held that the first principles of science cannot be demonstrated but must be assumed and taken for granted. The study of first principles, he believed, is the function of metaphysics, which is concerned with immaterial being. *He thought that intuition is the original source of human knowledge*; by this he did not mean an emotional ecstasy but, rather, an intellectual type of induction, whereby we know that what is true for one instance can be applied to all instances; and what is true of one member of the class can be applied to the total class. In short, primary premises can be grasped by intuition, and Aristotle believed that this form of inductive reasoning is just as certain as deduction, although he relied more heavily on the deductive method of logic.

In his logical treatises, Aristotle devoted much space to the fallacies which arise in intellectual arguments. He discussed not merely formal fallacies but also fallacies which arise out of ambiguity and are connected with verbal factors. He described how

errors are frequently made in logic by appeal to reverence, to piety, and to tradition. The courts of Athens gave him excellent ammunition for his observations regarding logical weaknesses and logical errors.

What is the lasting significance of Aristotle's logic? (1) Through it he provided a rational discipline for philosophy. He showed that all speculation involves logical consistency and must be based on definite logical principles. (2) He outlined the elements of deductive logic and described the fallacies which arise in various arguments. (3) He discussed the nature of scientific demonstration and in this respect gave voice to the ideal of Greek science, which was interested in rational understanding rather than in experimentation. (4) He made a distinction between (a) deduction, which starts with general principles and derives specific facts from it and (b) induction, which starts with particulars and then arrives at a generalization. (5) He made a clear distinction between validity and truth: validity is concerned with the form of logic whereas truth deals with the content of logic. (6) He laid down excellent rules for definition, and they can still be used today. Finally, (7) he laid the foundation for the complete classification of the sciences.

### ARISTOTELIAN METAPHYSICS

Aristotle's discussions in his logical treatises indicate that he believed truth can be known. He shows in the *Metaphysics* that truth is both easy and difficult to discover:

"An indication of this is found in the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, we do not collectively fail, but every one says something true about the nature of things, and while individually we contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed. Therefore, since the truth seems to be like the proverbial door, which no one can fail to hit, in this respect it must be easy, but the fact that we can have a whole truth and not the particular part we aim at shows the difficulty of it.

"Perhaps, too, as difficulties are of two kinds, the cause of the present difficulty is not in the facts but in us. For as the eyes of bats are [blind] to the blaze of day, so is the reason in our soul to the things which are by nature most evident of all."<sup>10</sup>

Plato, like Aristotle, explained that scientific knowledge is primarily concerned with universal essences; but Plato had sought

<sup>10</sup> *Metaphysics*, II, 993 a-b.

reality in the region of Ideas, which are completely transcendent. Aristotle made a sharp criticism of the Platonic concept of Ideas. First of all, he contended, the concept of Ideas does not provide a fruitful function in philosophy, for Plato asserted that Ideas exist apart from things. Aristotle asked how we can have definite knowledge of a transcendent realm. Since Ideas are *static*, he argued, they cannot account for the change which takes place in the phenomenal world.

Aristotle also felt that inevitably contradictions arise when we try to combine universal Ideas with *particular* existence. In fact, Plato had never exactly explained how these two realms can be united, and in the *Parmenides*, one of the later dialogues which deals most clearly with the criticism of Ideas, he had left the entire problem undecided.

Plato and Aristotle agreed that the world of the senses is in a state of flux. But this did not mean to Aristotle that we must transcend the world of the senses and use the Ideas as escapes from reality. Rather, he felt, scientific knowledge could best be advanced by an investigation of the forms which reside *within* phenomena.

If we regard the Ideas as numbers, we are likewise in a dilemma. Aristotle asked, How can numbers be causes? He shows clearly that numbers cannot be the principles responsible for the changes in the phenomenal world. In the *Metaphysics* he also attacked the earlier cosmologists. Their main error, he felt, lay in not distinguishing between the various causes.

This brings us to his famous doctrine of the four causes: (1) the material cause; (2) the efficient cause; (3) the formal cause; (4) the final cause. " 'Cause' means (1) that from which, as immanent material, a thing comes into being, *e.g.*, the bronze is the cause of the statue and the silver of the saucer, and so are the classes which include these. (2) The form or pattern, *i.e.*, the definition of the essence, and the classes which include this (*e.g.*, the ratio 2:1 and number in general are causes of the octave), and the parts included in the definition. (3) That from which the change or the resting from change first begins, *e.g.*, the adviser is a cause of the action, and the father a cause of the child, and in general the maker a cause of the thing made and the change-producing of the changing. (4) The end, *i.e.*, that for the sake of which a thing is, *e.g.*, health is the cause of walking. For 'Why does one walk?' we say; 'That one may be healthy'; and in speaking thus we think we have given the cause. The same is true of all the means that intervene before the end,

when something else has put the process in motion, as, *e.g.*, thinning or purging or drugs or instruments intervene before health is reached; for all these are for the sake of the end, though they differ from one another in that some are instruments and others are actions."<sup>11</sup>

20 To give another example of Aristotle's doctrine of causality, let us choose the building of a house. First, there must be building material (material cause); second, an architect (efficient cause); third, an outline of the form of the house (formal cause); fourth, we must know why the house is being built (final cause).

It should be noted that Aristotle dwelt mainly upon the final cause, which, he thought, is the real principle of explanation. He constantly asked the question, What is the function of things? What is their ultimate goal? Modern science, on the other hand, takes a more mechanistic view than Aristotle took and is concerned primarily with description without bothering with ultimate problems.

12 Another important contribution of Aristotle is his concept of nature. He used nature in a sixfold sense: "'Nature' means (1) the genesis of growing things—the meaning which would be suggested if one were to pronounce the *γ* in *physis* long. (2) That immanent part of a growing thing from which its growth first proceeds. (3) The source from which the primary movement in each natural object is present in it in virtue of its own essence. Those things are said to grow which derive increase from something else by contact and either by organic unity or by organic adhesion, as in the case of embryos. Organic unity differs from contact, for in the latter case there need not be anything besides the contact, but in organic unities there is something identical in both parts, which makes them grow together instead of merely touching, and be one in respect of continuity and quantity, though not of quality. (4) 'Nature' means the primary material of which any natural object consists or out of which it is made, which is relatively unshaped and cannot be changed from its own potency, as *e.g.*, bronze is said to be the nature of a statue and of bronze utensils, and wood the nature of wooden things; and so in all other cases; for when a product is made out of these materials, the first matter is preserved throughout. For it is in this way that people call the elements of natural objects also their nature, some naming fire, others earth, others air, others water, others something else of the sort, and some naming more than one of these, and others all of them. (5) 'Nature' means the *essence* of nat-

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 1013 a-b.

ural objects, as with those who say the nature is the primary mode of composition. . . . (6) By an extension of meaning from this sense of 'nature' every essence in general has come to be called a 'nature,' because the nature of a thing is one kind of essence."<sup>12</sup>

According to Aristotle, nature is alive and not static. Thus he is distinguished from Democritus, who had reduced nature to *quantitative* relations. While Aristotle did not exclude mechanical causes, he held them to be secondary. He conceived of nature teleologically; in fact, this concept of purpose is primary in his philosophy. Nature constitutes an unfolding essence in which the lower realm is subordinated to the higher sphere, all serving as a preparation for God.

The Aristotelian outlook dominated the Western world until the Renaissance, and even then it was only slowly overcome. Because of it, most scientists were concerned with the sublime and heavenly causes rather than with mundane facts. Modern science has almost reversed the process. It investigates all aspects of nature, regardless of their dignity or lack of it. Pavlov, for example, spent many years investigating the saliva of a dog and its relationship to psychological processes. Modern science, while less spectacular than Aristotelian science, achieves more definite experimental results.

Most important, perhaps, in Aristotle's metaphysics is his belief in the unity of matter and form. Matter, he stated, gives the substance to things; form, their outline and boundary. Every object, then, has a *matter and a form*. But this is not a static relationship, for we constantly observe how matter passes into form and form into matter. We might take a concrete example. Take the seed of an orange. It is the matter of which the orange is the form. When we eat the orange, however, the orange becomes matter for our body, which in turn becomes a form.

In the sensible world we cannot find formless matter or matterless form. Thus, Aristotle overcomes the dualism of Plato, who had sharply distinguished between a realm of becoming and that of eternal Forms. Aristotle, on the other hand, united form and matter and hence had a more *monistic* outlook than his teacher.

Also, Aristotle identified *matter with potentiality and form with actuality*. In general, he emphasized actuality more than potentiality. Thus, at least in his doctrine of God, he was more concerned with the form of things than with their matter or their potentiality. This, again, is in line with Greek thinking, which was concerned with the principle of limit, for the form of Aristotle supplies a definite out-

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1014 b-1015 a.

line and a definite boundary. It is resisted to some extent by matter, but no dualistic principle results, and Aristotle, unlike Plato, did not assert that matter is the principle of Not-being.

He made it clear that actuality is prior to potentiality; that form comes before matter: "(1) Clearly it is prior in formula; for that which is in the primary sense potential is potential because it is possible for it to become active; e.g., I mean by 'capable of building' that which can build, and by 'capable of seeing' that which can see, and by 'visible' that which can be seen. And the same account applies to all other cases, so that the formula and the knowledge of the one must precede the knowledge of the other.

"(2) In time it is prior in this sense: the actual which is identical in species though not in number with a potentially existing thing is prior to it. I mean that to this particular man who now exists actually and to the corn and to the seeing object the matter and the seed and that which is capable of seeing, which are potentially a man and corn and seeing, but not yet actually so, are prior in time; but prior in time to these are other actually existing things, from which they were produced."<sup>13</sup>

This, however, is not the only argument for the priority of the actual, for Aristotle believed it is also prior in substantiality: "... because the things that are posterior in becoming are prior in form and in substantiality (e.g., man is prior to boy and human being to seed; for the one already has its form, and the other has not), and because everything that comes to be moves towards a principle, i.e., an end (for that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and the becoming is for *the sake of the end*), and the actuality is the end, and it is for the *sake of this that the potency is acquired*. For animals do not see in order that they may have sight, but they have sight *that they may see*. And similarly men have the art of building that they may build, and theoretical science that they may theorize . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Another argument is that eternal things are prior to phenomena, which are in a constant state of flux, and eternal things never exist potentially:

"The reason is this. Every potency is at one and the same time a potency of the opposite; for, while that which is not capable of being present in a subject cannot be present, everything that is being may possibly not be actual. That, then, which is capable of being

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 1049 b.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1050 a.



may either be or not be; the same thing, then, is capable both of being and of not being. And that which is capable of not being may possibly not be; and that which may possibly not be is perishable, either in the full sense, or in the precise sense in which it is said that it possibly may not be, *i.e.*, in respect either of place or of quantity or quality; 'in the full sense' means 'in respect of substance.' Nothing, then, which is in the full sense imperishable is in the full sense potentially existent (though there is nothing to prevent its being so in some respect, *e.g.*, potentially of a certain quality or in a certain place); all imperishable things, then, exist actually."<sup>15</sup>

### ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF GOD

Aristotle's discussion of potentiality and actuality was founded upon his belief in a pure actuality, namely, God. Aristotle's God occupies the pinnacle of the metaphysical structure. God contains no potentiality; he is *pure form*. The main argument for the existence of God, in Aristotle, is the necessity of finding a first cause of motion. He appeals to a force which is unchangeable:

"The first mover, then, exists of necessity; and in so far as it exists by necessity, its mode of being is good, and it is in this sense a first principle. For the necessary has all these senses—that which is necessary perforce because it is contrary to the natural impulse, that without which the good is impossible, and that which cannot be otherwise but can exist only in a single way."<sup>16</sup>

For a moment Aristotle's language becomes almost mystical and exuberant: "And it is a life such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time (for it is ever in this state, which we cannot be), since its actuality is also pleasure. (And for this reason are waking, perception, and thinking most pleasant, and hopes and memories are so on account of these.) And thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, *i.e.*, the essence, is thought. But it is *active* when it possesses this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of con-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1050 b.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, XII, 1072 b.

templation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better, this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God."<sup>17</sup>

God's action is the primary cause of all things, Aristotle asserted, and God is perfect in every way:

"It is clear then from what has been said that there is a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things. It has been shown also that this substance cannot have any magnitude but is without parts and indivisible (for it produces movement through infinite time, but nothing finite has infinite power; and, while every magnitude is either infinite or finite, it cannot, for the above reason, have finite magnitude, and it cannot have infinite magnitude because there is no infinite magnitude at all). But it has also been shown that it is impassive and unalterable; for all the other changes are posterior to change of place."<sup>18</sup>

There arises another problem, namely the nature of divine thought:

"The nature of the divine thought involves certain problems; for while thought is held to be the most divine of things observed by us, the question how it must be situated in order to have that character involves difficulties. For if it thinks of nothing, what is there here of dignity? It is just like one who sleeps. And if it thinks, but this depends on something else, then (since that which is its substance is not the act of thinking, but a potency) it cannot be the best substance, for it is through thinking that its value belongs to it. Further, whether its substance is the faculty of thought or the act of thinking, what does it think of? Either of itself or of something else; and if of something else, either of the same thing always or of something different. Does it matter, then, or not, whether it thinks of the good or of any chance thing? Are there not some things about which it is incredible that it should think? Evidently, then, it thinks of that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change; for change would be change for the worse, and this would be already a movement. First, then, if 'thought' is not the act of think-

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1072 b.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1073 a.

ing but a potency, it would be reasonable to suppose that the continuity of its thinking is wearisome to it. Second, there would evidently be something else more precious than thought, *viz.*, that which is thought of. For both thinking and the act of thought will belong even to one who thinks of the worst thing in the world, so that if this ought to be avoided (and it ought, for there are even some things which it is better not to see than to see), the act of thinking cannot be the best of things. Therefore it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking."<sup>19</sup>

Briefly, according to Aristotle, God is only occupied with himself. He is not concerned with the universe. He is not personal in the sense of the Christian God, nor does he respond to our prayers and to our desires. Our relationship to God must be almost Spinozistic. In loving him we do not expect to be loved in return. We regard him as the climax of perfection, according to which we model our actions and our aspirations.

Some will object to such a concept of God and say that it lacks content, for Aristotle's God is distant and has no active relationship with the universe. To some extent the objection is valid, but it must be remembered that Aristotle's God is based on scientific grounds, not on spiritual foundations. He is needed as a principle of explanation to give unity to the universe and as the goal of man's intellectual search.

## ARISTOTLE AND THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

In turning to Aristotle's theories of physical science, we find them mostly contained in two books, the *Physics* and *On the heavens*. To a modern reader, many of his arguments seem to be fantastic. Undoubtedly Aristotle's system is more anthropomorphic than our own; still, Aristotle was working under handicaps. Greek science, as yet, had not developed an elaborate system of mathematics. The instruments which have aided modern science immensely, such as the microscope and the telescope, were unknown to Aristotle.

In Book One of the *Physics*, he took up the first principles of nature. He argued against the Eleatic viewpoint that reality is one; the Eleatics, he maintained, had not given an adequate account of motion and change. At the same time, he argued against others, who had reduced the principles of nature to one, two, or three causes.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1074 b.

In Book Two of the *Physics*, Aristotle distinguished the natural philosopher from the mathematician and described various conditions of change.

Book Three is occupied with a discussion of motion. In it he enumerated three kinds of motion: *quantitative, qualitative, and spatial*. Next, he turned to the problem of infinity and criticized the Pythagoreans for accepting the concept of infinity. He felt that in reality natural bodies are *finite*.

In Book Four, he took up three main problems: space, void, and time. He stated that the universe contains space; outside the universe there can be no space. He concluded, *the universe is finite and spherical*.

In turning to the problem of the void, Aristotle invalidated the arguments of the Atomists. He believed there is no void, nor can there be any emptiness within bodies. Space cannot be conceived apart from bodies. Thus he followed pre-Socratic philosophy, which most of the time abhorred the concept of emptiness.

Aristotle's discussion of time is rather abstruse. He contended that time, like space, is continuous, but unlike space it has neither beginning nor end. He defined time as "a measure of motion." Motion, then, is necessary for our concept of time, but still there is a distinction between motion and time, for motion is specific whereas time is universal. Motion is connected with particular bodies, whereas time is the universal foundation of experience. Aristotle believed that the only reality of time is the present, the now, but that our mind makes it possible to obtain a consciousness of the past and to anticipate the future. To some extent, time is subjective; without a mind it would be impossible to conceive of time.

To summarize Aristotle's views of space, the void, and time, we find him asserting: The universe contains space, there is no space outside of it, and space is finite. Unlike the Atomists, he did not believe in a vacuum, and he maintained that space and time are united by motion.

The other books of his *Physics* are less noteworthy. In Book Five he took up the classification of movements and changes and defined such terms as together, apart, touch, intermediate, successive, contiguous, and continuous. He discussed the unity and diversity of movements and made a distinction between movement and rest.

The problem of movement is continued in Books Six and Seven. In Book Eight he described the first mover, showing how its motion is eternal, unmoved by anything outside of itself.

This brings us to Aristotle's view of the physical structure of the universe. From Empedocles he borrowed the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water—which make up the physical universe. However, he held that heaven is composed of ether, the noblest element. Its motion is circular, he wrote, whereas the movement of the other bodies is either upward or downward.

The astronomical doctrines of Aristotle are explained in more detail in his treatise *On the heavens*. Book One emphasizes the importance of circular movement, and it makes clear that everything below the moon is subject to flux and passes away; but above the moon, nothing can be destroyed or created. He tried to prove that there cannot be more than one heaven and that there is no place or time outside heaven. He attacked the theories of his predecessors who had asserted that heaven can be created.

In Book Two, Aristotle reviewed the opinions of his predecessors regarding the position and shape of the earth. The earth, he concluded, is at the center of the universe and is spherical in shape. Consequently he supported the geocentric hypothesis, and his arguments were used to fight those who believed in the heliocentric theory and asserted that the earth moves around the sun.

In Book Three he discussed the elements of the various bodies and attacked the views of Democritus, who had reduced nature to atomic particles. Aristotle states that it is impossible to differentiate the elements by their shape; rather, they must be differentiated by their qualities. The elements are not eternal but are generated out of one another. He describes fire as light, which naturally tends upward; while earth is heavy and thus tends downward. This subject is discussed in the Fourth Book, which also explains the variety of motion exhibited by the elements and contains fresh attacks on the theories of the Atomists.

The significance of Aristotle's physical views, besides his geocentric hypothesis, lies in his distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial realm. According to him, the heavenly bodies are superior to the earth, and their motion is distinct from the rectilinear movement of the earth. He almost re-introduced Platonic concepts. His view that the heavenly bodies are eternal proved to be a stumbling block in the development of modern science. Today we realize that flux and change govern everything, and we have almost returned to the pre-Socratic thinkers who accepted a plurality of worlds.

To visualize Aristotle's astronomy, it is necessary to understand its main features: The earth is at the center of the universe and

stationary; surrounding it are a sphere of air and a sphere of fire. Aristotle spoke about the component motions of fifty-five spheres. In his *Metaphysics* he explained how he arrived at this number:

"But it is necessary, if all the spheres combined are to explain the observed facts, that for each of the planets there should be other spheres (one fewer than those hitherto assigned) which counteract those already mentioned and bring back to the same position the outermost sphere of the star which in each case is situated below the star in question; for only thus can all the forces at work produce the observed motion of the planets. Since, then, the spheres involved in the movement of the planets themselves are—eight for Saturn and Jupiter and twenty-five for the others, and of these only those involved in the movements of the lowest-situated planet need not be counteracted, the spheres which counteract those of the outermost two planets will be six in number, and the spheres which counteract those of the next four planets will be sixteen; therefore the number of all the spheres—both those which move the planets and those which counteract these—will be fifty-five."<sup>20</sup>

Then we find the heaven of the fixed stars which is situated next to God, who is the teleological source of all motion. All this is a very poetic concept, but scientifically it is of doubtful value, and the views of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler have undermined the Aristotelian hypothesis. Today we accept the heliocentric hypothesis.

### THE LEVELS OF THE SOUL

In the field of biology Aristotle undoubtedly made more lasting contributions than in the realm of physical science. As a naturalist he was praised by such outstanding scientists as Cuvier and Buffon; and, indeed, his studies in the *History of animals* regarding the principles, functions, and structures of various animals were almost epoch-making in the development of natural science. Again, we must remember that he lacked instruments and was hindered in his researches by the general limitations of Greek science.

Aristotle divided zoology into three divisions: first, natural history; second, the organs and functions of animals (anatomy and physiology); and third, the growth of animals (embryology). In the last-named field, especially, he made important advances. He showed, for example, how the family contributes to generation. He thought the male contributes the form, while the female contributes

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1073 b-1074 a.

the substance to generation. All in all, he discussed over five hundred different types of animals. His knowledge of them was not always exact, and occasionally he relied on the reports of travelers without making first-hand studies.

To understand nature, Aristotle believed, we must have a knowledge of the soul. According to him, the soul is not merely the principle of thought; rather, it is the basic principle of life. He felt that the problem of the soul is foremost in the sciences:

"Holding as we do that, while knowledge of any kind is a thing to be honored and prized, one kind of it may, either by reason of its greater exactness or of a higher dignity and greater wonderfulness in its objects, be more honorable and precious than another, on both accounts we should naturally be led to place in the front rank the study of the soul. The knowledge of the soul admittedly contributes greatly to the advance of truth in general, and, above all, to our understanding of Nature, for the soul is in some sense the principle of animal life. Our aim is to grasp and understand, first its essential nature, and secondly its properties; of these some are thought to be affections proper to the soul itself, while others are considered to attach to the animal owing to the presence within it of soul."<sup>21</sup>

In reviewing the opinions of earlier thinkers about the soul, he emphasized that the soul is not a harmony as some Pythagoreans thought; nor is it a self-moving number; nor is it composed of elements. He regarded the soul as the *form of the body*. Thus, the soul is the actuality of which body is the potentiality. Technically, he defined it as the first entelechy of the body:

"That is why the soul is the first grade of actuality of a natural body having life potential in it. The body so described is a body which is organized. The parts of plants in spite of their extreme simplicity are 'organs'; e.g., the leaf serves to shelter the pericarp, the pericarp to shelter the fruit, while the roots of plants are analogous to the mouth of animals, both serving for the absorption of food. If, then, we have to give a general formula applicable to all kinds of soul, we must describe it as the first grade of actuality of a natural organized body. That is why we can wholly dismiss as unnecessary the question whether the soul and the body are one: It is as meaningless as to ask whether the wax and the shape given to it by the stamp are one, or generally the matter of a thing and that of which it is the matter. Unity has many senses (as many as 'is'

<sup>21</sup> *De anima*, I, 402 a.

has), but the most proper and fundamental sense of both is the relation of an actuality to that of which it is the actuality."<sup>22</sup>

To Aristotle, soul and body formed one substance, but the soul contained various faculties. Among them we find the faculties of nutrition, sensation, appetite, locomotion, and reason. Plants contain the principle of nutrition, animals possess sensation, while human beings are distinguished by reason.

Aristotle devoted a cursory survey to plants which are distinguished by a capacity for nutrition and reproduction. His discussion of food and nutrition is still quite elementary, as can be seen in the following:

"Food has a power which is other than the power to increase the bulk of what is fed by it; so far forth as what has soul in it is a quantum, food may increase its quantity, but it is only so far as what has soul in it is a 'this-somewhat' or substance that food acts as food; in that case it maintains the being of what is fed, and that continues to be what it is so long as the process of nutrition continues. . . ."<sup>23</sup>

Aristotle showed that the process of nutrition involves three factors: "(a) what is fed, (b) that wherewith it is fed, (c) what does the feeding; of these (c) is the first soul, (a) the body which has that soul in it, (b) the food. But since it is right to call things after the ends they realize, and the end of this soul is to generate another being like that in which it is, the first soul ought to be named the reproductive soul. The expression (b) 'wherewith it is fed' is ambiguous just as is the expression 'wherewith the ship is steered'; that may mean either (i) the hand or (ii) the rudder, *i.e.*, either (i) what is moved and sets in movement, or (ii) what is merely moved. We can apply this analogy here if we recall that all food must be capable of being digested, and that what produces digestion is warmth; that is why everything that has soul in it possesses warmth."<sup>24</sup>

Unlike his discussion of nutrition, Aristotle's treatment of sensation is more exhaustive, although quite unscientific. He believed that flesh is the seat of sensation. Blood, he thought, communicates particular sensations and at the same time nourishes the body. He talked much about spontaneous generation.

Aristotle's discussion of sense-perception is contained in Book Two of the *De anima*. He distinguished among five external senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch; all of them have their proper

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 412 a-b.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 416 b.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 416 b.



object. He thought *touch* the most fundamental sense, but the others are also important. He made it clear that we do not directly perceive the external world; rather, we perceive through a medium. For example, we are able to smell because of moisture, and we are able to hear because of the existence of air.

It must be noted that Aristotle subordinated sense knowledge to rational knowledge. In this respect he represents the Greek view of psychology. Thus, the Greeks accepted the rationalistic mode of thinking, whereas modern science believes more in experience, and thus has an empirical foundation.

To unify all the senses, Aristotle made use of a *common sense* which organizes our perceptions of the external world. This common sense explains the possibility of consciousness. To make this point clear, let us be as specific as possible: Through our eyes we perceive certain colors. But how do we know that we perceive? Only through a unifying sense which gives order to our sensations and supplies a much-needed element of unity.

Opposed to sense knowledge, we have the activity of reason, which is concerned with universal, not specific, factors. Still, intellectual knowledge, Aristotle maintains, is not infallible. Very often our reason is faulty, for to some extent it is dependent on sense knowledge. Frequently the mind does not correctly combine the stimuli of the external world; also, time enters in as a disturbing factor. Occasionally we do not distinguish correctly between the past and the present and between the present and the future.

Famous is Aristotle's distinction between the passive and the active reason. The *passive reason* is mortal and is connected with the body. When the body perishes, the passive reason also dies. But the *active reason* is truly immortal. Since it is not dependent upon the individual soul, it is transcendent. He explained how the active reason is identified with the object:

"Mind in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity (for always the active is superior to the passive factor, the originating force to the matter which it forms).

"Actual knowledge is identical with its object: in the individual, potential knowledge is in time prior to actual knowledge, but in the universe as a whole it is not prior even in time. Mind is not at one time knowing and at another not. When mind is set free from its present conditions it appears as just what it is and nothing more: this alone is immortal and eternal (we do not, however, remember its

former activity because, while mind in this sense is impassible, mind as passive is destructible), and without it nothing thinks."<sup>25</sup>

It is the active reason which is the goal of existence. In fact, this activity characterizes the nature of the Divine Being. In the use of the active reason we are emancipated from the limitations of time, space, and individuality. It contains within itself no potentiality and no trace of possibility. As complete actuality, such a principle cannot be subject to creation or destruction; in a word, it is *truly eternal*.

We find many similarities between Spinoza and Aristotle. Spinoza, too, spoke about the deathlessness of the intellect, whereby he did not mean individual immortality. Aristotle, likewise, did not accept the idea of personal survival after death; rather, he thought that what survives is impersonal, universal, and independent of material determinations.

Most of the medieval scholars did not accept such a doctrine. They interpreted Aristotle as holding that the individual soul is immortal, and they identified the individual soul with the active intellect. They based their theistic arguments upon the contention of such ancient commentators as Simplicius and Boethius. But a careful reading of Aristotle scarcely substantiates their views, for he did not believe in personal immortality but, rather, in the immortality of active reason.

### GENERAL FEATURES OF ARISTOTLE'S PHILOSOPHY

So far, we have not pointed out the cardinal features of Aristotle's philosophy. For the sake of brevity, let us summarize them under five headings:

First, Aristotle's philosophy is based on the acceptance of universal conclusions from which specific facts are derived. It is deductive rather than inductive, for he taught that reason is concerned with the understanding of universal principles.

Second, there is stress on the concept of development, which is not regarded in a Darwinian way but in a teleological manner. The lower serves as a preparation for the higher; and all development is climaxed by the concept of the Prime Mover, who represents pure form and actuality.

Third, Aristotle believed that the most important subject of philosophy is metaphysics, the science which deals with immaterial

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 430 a.

Being. All other sciences he subordinated to this study, which was to give a comprehensive outline of reality.

Fourth, Aristotle enumerated three levels of the soul: (a) the vegetative soul; (b) the animal soul; (c) the rational soul. In his discussion of man he stressed particularly the power of reason; *only the active reason is immortal* in his view.

Fifth, his scientific views were guided by the geocentric hypothesis, which states that the earth is the center of the universe. He refused to accept the mechanistic hypothesis of Democritus, who upheld the reality of atoms and the existence of the void. Instead, Aristotle believed in irreducible qualities. He thought that space is finite and that no vacuum exists. His system was dominated by the concept of *purpose*, instead of necessity. Teleology, thus, is the keynote to Aristotle's philosophy.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Relate the important events of Aristotle's life.
2. What are the major works of Aristotle?
3. Compare and contrast Aristotle with Plato.
4. Why was Aristotle disliked by the Athenians?
5. Explain Aristotle's concept of teleology.
6. What contributions did Aristotle make to logic?
7. Explain Aristotle's concept of form and matter.
8. Explain Aristotle's view of God. What is your own concept of God?
9. What are the weaknesses of Aristotelian science? Compare Aristotle's view of science with the 20th-century concept of science.
10. What is the function of metaphysics, according to Aristotle?
11. Explain Aristotle's point of view regarding the soul.

# THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF ARISTOTLE

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## ETHICS

**T**he ethical views of Aristotle are an excellent representation of the Greek character. While we miss in them emotionalism and poetic insight, we can admire them for their restraint and symmetry. Throughout Aristotle's ethical philosophy we find moderation and balance. He realized that moral principles are not innate, as Plato had believed, but can be developed through the formation of wise habits. It was his aim to create a system of ethics which could be used in the formation of a better character and in the building of a more adequate society. He made it clear that maturity is required for such a study. This task excludes the inexperienced, for they are guided mainly by their passions. Maturity, to Aristotle, meant acting in accordance with a rational principle. Those who achieve this condition derive inestimable profit from the science of morality.

In the first book of the *Nichomachean ethics*, Aristotle discussed the problem of the Good. He disposed of the popular view that the

Good consists in wealth or pleasure; rather, he felt the Good must be autonomous and self-sufficient. He found it in happiness.

"Now such a thing, happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honor, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself."<sup>1</sup>

To say, however, that happiness is the main goal of life does not define happiness. To understand the nature of happiness, Aristotle stated, we must know the function of man. A man's function, he explained, cannot be defined by nutrition and growth, for he shares those traits with plants and animals. Nor can it be perception, since every animal has that capacity:

"There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought. And, as 'life of the rational element' also has two meanings, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term. Now if the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say 'a so-and-so' and 'a good so-and-so' have a function which is the same in kind, e.g., a lyre-player and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness being added to the name of the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well); if this is the case, (and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case,) human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete."<sup>2</sup>

Happiness, in short, implies a complete organization of life. To attain happiness we cannot depend on a momentary experience.

<sup>1</sup> *Nicomachean ethics*, I, 1079 a-b.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1098 a.

Aristotle pointed out that a brief pleasure does not make a man truly happy.

Continuing his discussion of the Good, Aristotle made a distinction between intellectual and moral virtue. He considered intellectual virtue superior to moral virtue, for it is based on a knowledge of ethical principles whereas moral virtue results from a correct way of life. The function of the teacher and the statesman is to provide the correct habits and thus to create a better society.

Now, the question arises, How do we know what virtue to choose?

Aristotle gave a specific answer:

"Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, *i.e.*, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme."<sup>3</sup>

Still, Aristotle realized that not every emotion or passion admits of a mean. There is no mean, according to him, in cases of theft, murder, or adultery:

"It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong. It would be equally absurd, then, to expect that in unjust, cowardly, and voluptuous action there should be a mean, an excess, and a deficiency; for at that rate there would be a mean of excess and of deficiency, an excess of excess, and a deficiency of deficiency. But as there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme, so too of the actions we have mentioned there is no mean nor any excess and deficiency, but however they are done they are wrong; for in general there is neither a mean of excess and deficiency, nor excess and deficiency of a mean."<sup>4</sup> He gave a specific example:

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 1107 a.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107 a.

"With regard to feelings of fear and confidence courage is the mean; of the people who exceed, he who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (many of the states have no name), while the man who exceeds in confidence is rash, and he who exceeds in fear and falls short in confidence is a coward. With regard to pleasures and pains—not all of them, and not so much with regard to the pains—the mean is temperance, the excess self-indulgence. Persons deficient with regard to the pleasures are not often found; hence such persons also have received no name. But let us call them 'insensible.'"<sup>5</sup>

He described the mean in economic matters:

"With regard to giving and taking of money the mean is liberality, the excess and the defect prodigality and meanness. In these actions people exceed and fall short in contrary ways; the prodigal exceeds in spending and falls short in taking, while the mean man exceeds in taking and falls short in spending. . . . With regard to money there are also other dispositions—a mean magnificence (for the magnificent man differs from the liberal man; the former deals with large sums, the latter with small ones), an excess, tastelessness and vulgarity, and a deficiency, niggardliness."<sup>6</sup>

Most instructive is Aristotle's discussion of justice. He made it clear that justice does not involve inalienable rights but a *sense of proportion*. We have an antidemocratic element in the ethical system of Aristotle, for he spoke of a different kind of justice in relation to the slave as compared with the relationship of free men. His concept of justice establishes a stratification of society according to which every person has a definite function and a definite worth, and consequently a definite status. According to him, women and children have less worth than mature men, and subjects are less important than their rulers.

The ideal man of Aristotle is in every way different from the ideal person of the Middle Ages. Aristotle believed in self-confidence and had no use for humility. The perfect man would strive for honor, according to Aristotle, and, candid in his feelings, would not conceal his passions. All in all, his actions would be dominated by naturalistic considerations.

In Book Six of the *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle described the various intellectual virtues. Among them he enumerated science, which contains a knowledge of necessary and eternal factors; art, which is mainly a technique of production; practical wisdom, which

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107 a-b.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107 b.

consists in a knowledge of how to secure the ends of our existence; intuitive reason, which deals with an understanding of the fundamental categories and principles of science; and philosophical wisdom, which combines scientific principles and intuitive reason. Philosophical wisdom, he wrote, is the highest type of virtue.

In Book Seven, Aristotle turned to the problems of continence, incontinence, and pleasure. Unlike Socrates, he was conscious of the fact that often, although we know the right standard, we do not choose it, for frequently our desires intervene.

In his discussion of pleasure, he steered a *middle course between hedonism and asceticism*. He did not consider pain a positive good nor did he accept the view that pleasures are connected with immediate bodily enjoyment, for the standard of all pleasures is rational contemplation, which alone is complete and perfect.

Aristotle's balance in this discussion is quite admirable. Unlike the Stoics, he thought that if we want to live a full life, we need certain external goods such as health and a moderate amount of property.

After discussing the various types of pleasures, Aristotle turned to friendship:

"It is said that those who are supremely happy and self-sufficient have no need of friends; for they have the things that are good, and therefore being self-sufficient they need nothing further, while a friend, being another self, furnishes what a man cannot provide by his own effort; whence the saying 'when fortune is kind, what need of friends?' But it seems strange, when one assigns all good things to the happy man, not to assign friends, who are thought the greatest of external goods. And if it is more characteristic of a friend to do well by another than to be well done by, and to confer benefits is characteristic of the good man and of virtue, and it is nobler to do well by friends than by strangers, the good man will need people to do well by. This is why the question is asked whether we need friends more in prosperity or in adversity, on the assumption that not only does a man in adversity need people to confer benefits on him, but also those who are prospering need people to do well by. Surely it is strange, too, to make the supremely happy man a solitary; for no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone, since man is a political creature and one whose nature is to live with others. Therefore even the happy man lives with others; for he has the things that are by nature good. And plainly it is better to spend his days with friends and good men than with



strangers or any chance persons. Therefore the happy man needs friends."<sup>7</sup>

According to Aristotle, there are three types of friendship. One is based on pleasure, another on utility, and the third on a selfless appreciation of the other person, who is regarded not as means to one's life but as an end in himself. He also held that friendship indicates the fundamental character of man:

"For friendship is a partnership, and as a man is to himself, so is he to his friend; now in his own case the consciousness of his being is desirable, and so therefore is the consciousness of his friend's being, and the activity of this consciousness is produced when they live together, so that it is natural that they aim at this. And whatever existence means for each class of men, whatever it is for whose sake they value life, in *that* they wish to occupy themselves with their friends; and so some drink together, others dice together, others join in athletic exercises and hunting, or in the study of philosophy, each class spending their days together in whatever they love most in life; for since they wish to live with their friends, they do and share in those things which give them the sense of living together. Thus the friendship of bad men turns out an evil thing (for because of their instability they unite in bad pursuits, and besides they become evil by becoming like each other), while the friendship of good men is good, being augmented by their companionship; and they are thought to become better too by their activities and by improving each other; for from each other they take the mould of the characteristics they approve—whence the saying 'noble deeds from noble men.'"<sup>8</sup>

What is especially noteworthy in Aristotle's treatment of friendship is his opposition to romantic love. This attitude again represents the Greek spirit, which regarded friendship among members of the same sex as being more important than love of the opposite sex. Aristotle's views are directed against extreme sentimentality. His ethical philosophy, throughout, is restrained and sober.

In the Tenth Book of the *Nicomachean ethics*, he again took up the problem of pleasure. Pleasures, he showed, differ according to the activities which they accompany; pleasure is not the *summum bonum* of life. Man's pleasure lies in the *development of his rational capacities*. To achieve the highest pleasure, Aristotle wrote, we must appreciate the contemplative life:

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 1169 b.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1171 b-1172 a.

"We assume the gods to be above all other beings blessed and happy; but what sort of actions must we assign to them? Acts of justice? Will not the gods seem absurd if they make contracts and return deposits, and so on? Acts of a brave man, then, confronting dangers and running risks because it is noble to do so? Or liberal acts? To whom will they give? It will be strange if they are really to have money or anything of the kind. And what would their temperate acts be? Is not such praise tasteless, since they have no bad appetites? If we were to run through them all, the circumstances of action would be found trivial and unworthy of gods. Still, every one supposes that they *live* and therefore that they are active; we cannot suppose them to sleep like Endymion. Now if you take away from a living being action, and still more production, what is left but contemplation? Therefore the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative; and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness."<sup>9</sup>

The goal of life, then, is the cultivation of our intellect. Such a state is not exposed to change or to misfortune. If we arrive at this state, we become almost godlike, and we are able to survey the universe as a whole. Such contemplation does not imply mortification of the body. It does not lead to mysticism, wrote Aristotle, for he explained:

"But, being a man, one will also need external prosperity; for our nature is not self-sufficient for the purpose of contemplation, but our body also must be healthy and must have food and other attention. Still, we must not think that the man who is to be happy will need many things or great things, merely because he cannot be supremely happy without external goods; for self-sufficiency and action do not involve excess, and we can do noble acts without ruling earth and sea; for even with moderate advantages one can act virtuously (this is manifest enough; for private persons are thought to do worthy acts no less than despots—indeed even more); and it is enough that we should have so much as that; for the life of the man who is active in accordance with virtue will be happy. Solon, too, was perhaps sketching well the happy man when he described him as moderately furnished with externals but as having done (as Solon thought) the noblest acts, and lived temperately; for one can with but moderate possessions do what one ought."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 1178 b.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1178 b-1179 a.

What, then, are the general features of Aristotle's ethical system? First, it is *humanistic*. The goal of ethics, Aristotle stated, is not the achievement of supernatural bliss; happiness, which stands for the rational organization of all our capacities, can be achieved on earth.

Second, it is an ethical system which tries to combat the extremes of bodily pleasure and mortification of the flesh. The Golden Mean represents a compromise through which virtue and sanity can be found.

Third, Aristotle lacks the dualism which we find in so many other ethical systems. There is no struggle and no essential conflict between our higher and our lower capacities, and between reason and emotion. The ethical life, according to him, represents a sense of harmonious proportion in which every capacity and every function of human nature have their rightful place.

Fourth, the ethical system of Aristotle is extroverted rather than introspective. Unlike modern ethical thinkers, he was not primarily concerned with the inner man. He knew nothing of ego, complexes, sublimation, suppression, and so on. He believed that it is possible for man to find himself as a member of society and that there is no fundamental conflict between the individual and the prevailing social institutions. Hence, we have a *social* emphasis in the ethical theory of Aristotle.

Finally, the moral theories of Aristotle are characterized by his faith in reason. Reason, he thought, can tell us about the means and the goals of the good life. The difference between men and animals, he asserted, lies in our possession of reason. It is this capacity which gives us a kinship with the gods. Thus, supreme happiness in Aristotle lies in the use of contemplation, through which we achieve true detachment and true objectivity.

## RHETORIC

The ethical doctrines of Aristotle cannot be fully appreciated unless we understand his concept of rhetoric. To him, rhetoric meant more than the art of speech. It was a technique whereby success could be achieved in political and legal life. He held that rhetoric can be useful in four different ways:

"... (1) because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites, so that if the decisions of judges are not what they ought to be, the defeat must be due to the speakers themselves, and they must be blamed accordingly. Moreover, (2) before some audiences not even the possession

of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction. For argument based on knowledge implies instruction, and there are people whom one cannot instruct. . . . Further, (3) we must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute him . . . (4) it is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason, when the use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs."<sup>11</sup>

To be successful the orator must make his speech credible. He must stir the emotions of his hearers, being able to prove the truth or even an apparent truth through convincing arguments.

Aristotle divided rhetoric into three types: one, political (deliberative); two, forensic (legal); three, epideictic (adapted to panegyric display). He was especially acute in his discussion of political rhetoric; he emphasized the point that the political speaker should be able to use generalities, a technique which has been so successfully used in the 20th century.

To be successful, wrote Aristotle, the political orator should study the various types of governments. The appeal in a democracy is different from that in an oligarchy. In a democracy the political orator should stress common ideals, common interests, and equality. In an oligarchy, he should dwell mainly on economic factors and utilitarian motives.

The legal orator should be an expert in psychology. He should be acquainted with the causes of human action, which are enumerated by Aristotle under seven headings. The first three are chance, nature, compulsion; these he regarded as involuntary. The other four—habit, reasoning, anger, and appetite—he viewed as voluntary. Generally, he affirmed the reality of free will but declared freedom is best realized when we act according to reason, not when we are slaves to emotions and our appetites.

Less important than his discussion of legal oratory is his treatment of epideictic rhetoric, or ceremonial oratory. This involves a knowledge of virtue and vice. Penetrating are his observations regarding the use of praise:

<sup>11</sup> *Rhetoric*, I, 1355 a-b.

"To praise a man is in one respect akin to urging a course of action. The suggestions which would be made in the latter case become encomiums when differently expressed. When we know what action or character is required, then, in order to express these facts as suggestions for action, we have to change and reverse our form of words. . . . Consequently, whenever you want to praise any one, think what you would urge people to do; and when you want to urge the doing of anything, think what you would praise a man for having done. Since suggestion may or may not forbid an action, the praise into which we convert it must have one or other of two opposite forms of expression accordingly.

"There are, also, many useful ways of heightening the effect of praise. We must, for instance, point out that a man is the only one, or the first, or almost the only one who has done something, or that he has done it better than anyone else; all these distinctions are honorable. And we must, further, make much of the particular season and occasion of an action, arguing that we could hardly have looked for it just then. If a man has often achieved the same success, we must mention this; that is a strong point; he himself, and not luck, will then be given the credit."<sup>12</sup>

Aristotle continued his psychological analysis in Book Two of the *Rhetoric*. He showed that rationality is not as important as a knowledge of human emotions. To accomplish his ends the speaker must put himself in the right light and also appeal to the *biases* of his hearers. He must impress his audience in such a way that everyone believes he possesses excellent qualities. His goal will be to have his hearers agree with him and despise his opponents.

The orator must also realize that he has to deal with various types of people; for example, if he has to speak to an assemblage of young people he should know something about the character of youth:

"Young men have strong passions, and tend to gratify them indiscriminately. Of the bodily desires, it is the sexual by which they are most swayed and in which they show absence of self-control. They are changeable and fickle in their desires, which are violent while they last, but quickly over: their impulses are keen but not deep-rooted, and are like sick people's attacks of hunger and thirst. They are hot-tempered and quick-tempered, and apt to give way to their anger; bad temper often gets the better of them, for owing to their love of honor they cannot bear being

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1367 b-1368 a.

slighted, and are indignant if they imagine themselves unfairly treated. While they love honor, they love victory still more; for youth is eager for superiority over others, and victory is one form of this. They love both more than they love money, which indeed they love very little, not having yet learnt what it means to be without it. . . . They look at the good side rather than the bad, not having yet witnessed many instances of wickedness. They trust others readily, because they have not yet often been cheated. They are sanguine; nature warms their blood as though with excess of wine; and besides that, they have as yet met with few disappointments. Their lives are mainly spent not in memory but in expectation; for expectation refers to the future, memory to the past, and youth has a long future before it and a short past behind it: on the first day of one's life one has nothing at all to remember, and can only look forward."<sup>13</sup>

Quite different from young men, Aristotle asserted, are those persons who have passed the prime of life and are now in their declining years:

"They have lived many years; they have often been taken in, and often made mistakes; and life on the whole is a bad business. The result is that they are sure about nothing and *underdo* everything. They 'think,' but they never 'know'; and because of their hesitation they always add a 'possibly' or a 'perhaps,' putting everything this way and nothing positively. They are cynical; that is, they tend to put the worse construction on everything. Further, their experience makes them distrustful and therefore suspicious of evil. Consequently they neither love warmly nor hate bitterly, but following the hint of bias they love as though they will some day hate and hate as though they will some day love. They are small-minded, because they have been humbled by life: their desires are set upon nothing more exalted or unusual than what will help them to keep alive. They are not generous, because money is one of the things they must have, and at the same time their experience has taught them how hard it is to get and how easy to lose. They are cowardly, and are always anticipating danger; unlike that of the young, who are warm-blooded, their temperament is chilly; old age has paved the way for cowardice; fear is, in fact, a form of chill. They love life; and all the more when their last day has come, because the object of all desire is something we have not got, and also because we desire most strongly that which we need most

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 1389 a.

urgently. They are too fond of themselves; this is one form that small-mindedness takes."<sup>14</sup>

Then Aristotle turned to the discussion of mature men, whose character is a mean between that of elderly people and that of youth:

"They have neither that excess of confidence which amounts to rashness, nor too much timidity, but the right of each. They neither trust everybody nor distrust everybody, but judge people correctly. Their lives will be guided not by the sole consideration either of what is noble or of what is useful, but by both; neither by parsimony nor by prodigality, but by what is fit and proper. So, too, in regard to anger and desire; they will be brave as well as temperate, and temperate as well as brave; these virtues are divided between the young and the old; the young are brave but intemperate, the old temperate but cowardly. To put it generally, all the valuable qualities that youth and age divide between them are united in the prime of life, while all their excesses or defects are replaced by moderation and fitness."<sup>15</sup>

The skillful orator, Aristotle continued, will vary his remarks by a knowledge of the positions in life which his assembled hearers represent. Thus he must study what effects good birth produces in the individual:

"Its effect on character is to make those who have it more ambitious; it is the way of all men who have something to start with to add to the pile, and good birth implies ancestral distinction. The well-born man will look down even on those who are as good as his own ancestors, because any far-off distinction is greater than the same thing close to us, and better to boast about. Being well-born, which means coming of a fine stock, must be distinguished from nobility, which means being true to the family nature—a quality not usually found in the well-born, most of whom are poor creatures. In the generations of men as in the fruits of the earth, there is a varying yield; now and then, where the stock is good, exceptional men are produced for a while, and then decadence sets in."<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle was quite cynical when he turned to the effect of wealth on character:

"Wealthy men are insolent and arrogant; their possession of wealth affects their understanding; they feel as if they had every

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1389 b.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1390 a-b.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1390 b.

good thing that exists; wealth becomes a sort of standard of value for everything else, and therefore they imagine there is nothing it cannot buy. They are luxurious and ostentatious; luxurious, because of the luxury in which they live and the prosperity which they display; ostentatious and vulgar, because, like other people's, their minds are regularly occupied with the object of their love and admiration, and also because they think that other people's idea of happiness is the same as their own. It is indeed quite natural that they should be affected thus; for if you have money, there are always plenty of people who come begging from you. Hence the saying of Simonides about wise men and rich men, in answer to Hiero's wife, who asked him whether it was better to grow rich or wise. 'Why, rich,' he said, 'for I see the wise men spending their days at the rich men's doors.' Rich men also consider themselves worthy to hold public office; for they consider they already have the things that give a claim to office. In a word, the type of character produced by wealth is that of a prosperous fool."<sup>17</sup>

Next, Aristotle discussed the impact of power on the human character:

"Those in power are more ambitious and more manly in character than the wealthy, because they aspire to do the great deeds that their power permits them to do. Responsibility makes them more serious: they have to keep paying attention to the duties their position involves. They are dignified rather than arrogant, for the respect in which they are held inspires them with dignity and therefore with moderation—dignity being a mild and becoming form of arrogance. If they wrong others, they wrong them not on a small but on a great scale."<sup>18</sup>

The rest of Book Two of the *Rhetoric* need not concern us very much, for in it Aristotle mainly discussed the technical devices of rhetoric. He showed, for example, how *maxims* should be used: They lend a tone of morality to the speech, for they express universal truths which can readily be accepted. Throughout his discussion he kept in mind that an audience is guided by emotional reactions rather than by objective reasoning.

In Book Three, he took up stylistic factors. The orator's language, he made clear, should not be too ornate. He must state his argument so that the audience can easily understand it. A speech, according to Aristotle, contains four parts: an introduction, a statement, a proof,

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1390 b-1391 a.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1391 a.



and an epilogue. The introduction, he believed, corresponds to the prologue in poetry and to the prelude in flute music.

He concluded his discussion in the *Rhetoric* by outlining the parts of the epilogue.

"(1) Having shown your own truthfulness and the untruthfulness of your opponent, the natural thing is to commend yourself, censure him, and hammer in your points. You must aim at one of two objects—you must make yourself out a good man and him a bad one either in yourselves or in relation to your hearers. . . .

"(2) The facts having been proved, the natural thing to do next is to magnify or minimize their importance. The facts must be admitted before you can discuss how important they are; just as the body cannot grow except from something already present. . . .

"(3) Next, when the facts and their importance are clearly understood, you must excite your hearer's emotions. These emotions are pity, indignation, anger, hatred, envy, emulation, pugnacity. . . .

"(4) Finally you have to review what you have already said. Here you may properly do what some wrongly recommended doing in the introduction—repeat your points frequently so as to make them easily understood. What you *should* do in your introduction is to state your subject, in order that the point to be judged may be quite plain; in the epilogue you should summarize the arguments by which your case has been proved." <sup>19</sup>

## POLITICS

The realistic note in the *Rhetoric* is reinforced by Aristotle's *Politics*, in which he wrote that man is naturally a social animal and that a life of political isolation is impossible. The state he regarded as the highest form of community life. As a member of the state, man is the noblest of all animals; if he lives outside it, he reverts to a beast.

Unlike modern totalitarians, Aristotle did not believe that the state exists as a goal in itself. To him it was not an autonomous organization, nor did it possess a supermoral status. On the contrary, he claimed, *the purpose of the state is the moral perfection of its citizens*.

Most remarkable in Book One of the *Politics* is the discussion of slavery, which Aristotle viewed as a natural institution. He defined the slave as a piece of property, and he argued for slavery on the basis that everywhere in nature we find a ruler and a subject. Slaves, he felt, could acquire only an inferior type of virtue. But he did

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 1419 b.

not mean that a slave should not receive any education at all, for he thought a slave could achieve a certain level of moral insight.

Turning from the subject of slavery, Aristotle discussed the relation of husband and wife. Unlike Plato, he did not believe in the equality of the sexes. It is best for the husband to rule the household, he decided, and the wife to take care of domestic duties.

In Book Two of the *Politics* Aristotle criticized the various concepts of utopia. He was especially harsh with Plato's *Republic*, for he believed such a republic would create too much uniformity and reduce all citizens to the same level. Furthermore, he objected to Plato's confiscation of private property, an action which would only create strife and civil disorder. As for setting up a community of wives and children, this step in his opinion would destroy natural emotions.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle regarded private property as a source of happiness because it teaches men to lead a civilized life and to enjoy the fruits of their efforts. If it were abolished, he declared, we would return to lawless barbarism. Plato's utopia he considered impractical and utterly unworkable in a realistic society.

As a practical political scientist, he turned to the existing types of states. Whereas Plato had idealized the Spartan way of life, Aristotle knew the weaknesses of the Spartans. Among the defects of the Spartan state he noted, first, the women were too influential. Second, wealth was owned by the few. Third, the executive and legislative organs of the Spartan government had disintegrated. Fourth, the Spartan state was fit only for war, and yet even in war Sparta could make little progress because of an inadequate financial system.

Book Three of the *Politics* discusses the problem of citizenship. In it Aristotle held that the citizen should know both how to rule and how to obey. Since citizenship requires leisure, he advocated that mechanics be excluded from the ideal state.

He defined three types of good governments: monarchy, aristocracy, and polity (aristocratic democracy). Then he noted three perversions of these good types: tyranny, oligarchy, and extreme democracy.

He emphasized the importance of having *rational laws*. Governments which are based merely on instinct and momentary passion soon disintegrate, he declared; in the best government there is an equilibrium of the classes. This ideal influenced the founders of our American republic, who likewise believed in a definite division of powers.

Every state, Aristotle noted in Book Four, is composed of three classes: one which is wealthy, another which is poor, and the middle class. As in his ethical philosophy, he favored a compromise:

"... The middle class is least likely to shrink from rule, or to be overambitious for it; both of which are injuries to the state. Again, those who have too much of the goods of fortune, strength, wealth, friends, and the like, are neither willing nor able to submit to authority. The evil begins at home; for when they are boys, by reason of the luxury in which they are brought up, they never learn, even at school, the habit of obedience. On the other hand, the very poor, who are in the opposite extreme, are too degraded. So that the one class cannot obey, and can only rule despotically; the other knows not how to command and must be ruled like slaves. Thus arises a city, not of freemen, but of masters and slaves, the one despising, the other envying; and nothing can be more fatal to friendship and good fellowship in states than this: for good fellowship springs from friendship; when men are at enmity with one another, they would rather not even share the same path. But a city ought to be composed, as far as possible, of equals and similars; and these are generally the middle classes. Wherefore the city which is composed of middle-class citizens is necessarily best constituted." <sup>20</sup>

A government based on the middle class is likely to be more stable: "Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered, in which the middle class is large, and stronger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either singly; for the addition of the middle class turns the scale, and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant. Great then is the good fortune of a state in which the citizens have a moderate and sufficient property; for where some possess much, and the others nothing, there may arise an extreme democracy, or a pure oligarchy; or a tyranny may grow out of either extreme—either out of the most rampant democracy, or out of an oligarchy; but it is not so likely to arise out of the middle constitutions and those akin to them." <sup>21</sup>

According to Aristotle, if a new constitution is to be established, the legislator must understand the functions, powers, and importance of the other departments of the government. In this view we

<sup>20</sup> *Politics*, IV, 1295 b.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1295 b.

have the genesis of the American form of government, which believes that justice is best administered when there is a balance of power among the three branches of government.

Especially illuminating is Aristotle's discussion of revolutions in Book Five of the *Politics*. Among the causes of revolution we generally find a struggle between rich and poor as a danger signal. Whenever one class becomes too powerful, the danger of political violence increases. The middle class usually preserves the balance of power and thus tends to prevent revolutions.

In democratic states, Aristotle averred, revolution is frequently caused by demagogues who become generals and by intense competition among the politicians. When the rich are persecuted, they usually rebel against the rule of the people. In oligarchies the people may resist their oppressors, although oligarchies are usually overthrown by their own members. Frequently ambition conspires against oligarchy, and one man may arise who assumes absolute control of the government. Aristotle noted that aristocracies tend to become oligarchies. Aristocracies are threatened both by the underprivileged class and by ambitious men.

How can revolutions be avoided? How can the spirit of insurrection be conquered? How can governments be best preserved? Aristotle believed that the ruler should exemplify certain virtues, such as loyalty, ability, and justice. Furthermore, citizens should be educated in the spirit of the constitution. To preserve the status quo, Aristotle made some very practical proposals: (1) The rights of the underprivileged are to be safeguarded; (2) there is to be harmony between ruler and subjects; (3) subversive forces are to be watched; (4) property qualifications are to be changed from time to time; (5) no individual or class is to become too powerful; (6) corruption among public officials is not to be allowed; (7) no class is to be oppressed.

Aristotle even gave some excellent advice to the tyrants and showed how their form of government could be preserved. The ruler of this type of government "should lop off those who are too high; he must put to death men of spirit; he must not allow common meals, clubs, education, and the like; he must be on his guard against anything which is likely to inspire either courage or confidence among his subjects; he must prohibit literary assemblies or other meetings for discussion, and he must take every means to prevent people from knowing one another (for acquaintance begets mutual confidence). Further, he must compel all persons staying

in the city to appear in public and live at his gates; then he will know what they are doing; if they are always kept under, they will learn to be humble. In short, he should practice these and the like Persian and barbaric arts, which all have the same object. A tyrant should also endeavor to know what each of his subjects says or does, and should employ spies, like the 'female detectives' at Syracuse, and the eavesdroppers whom Hiero was in the habit of sending to any place of resort or meeting; for the fear of informers prevents people from speaking their minds, and if they do, they are more easily found out. Another art of the tyrant is to sow quarrels among the citizens; friends should be embroiled with friends, the people with the notables, and the rich with one another. Also he should impoverish his subjects; he thus provides against the maintenance of a guard by the citizens, and the people, having to keep hard at work, are prevented from conspiring. . . . Another practice of tyrants is to multiply taxes, after the manner of Dionysius at Syracuse, who contrived that within five years his subjects should bring into the treasury their whole property. The tyrant is also fond of making war in order that his subjects may have something to do and be always in want of a leader. And whereas the power of a king is preserved by his friends, the characteristic of a tyrant is to distrust his friends, because he knows that all men want to overthrow him, and they above all have the power."<sup>22</sup>

Yet, there is another method by which tyranny may be maintained. Aristotle sounds almost like Machiavelli, for he stressed the importance of *deception* on the part of the tyrant:

"In the first place he should pretend a care of the public revenues, and not waste money in making presents of a sort at which the common people get excited when they see their hard-won earnings snatched from them and lavished on courtesans and strangers and artists. He should give an account of what he receives and of what he spends (a practice which has been adopted by some tyrants); for then he will seem to be a steward of the public rather than a tyrant; nor need he fear that, while he is the lord of the city, he will ever be in want of money. Such a policy is at all events much more advantageous for the tyrant when he goes from home, than to leave behind him a hoard, for then the garrison who remain in the city will be less likely to attack his power; and a tyrant, when he is absent from home, has more reason to fear the guardians of his treasure than the citizens, for the one accompany him, but the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 1313 a-1313 b.

others remain behind. In the second place, he should be seen to collect taxes and to require public services only for state purposes, and that he may form a fund in case of war, and generally he ought to make himself the guardian and treasurer of them, as if they belonged, not to him, but to the public. He should appear, not harsh, but dignified, and when men meet him they should look upon him with reverence, and not with fear. Yet it is hard for him to be respected if he inspires no respect, and therefore whatever virtues he may neglect, at least he should maintain the character of a great soldier, and produce the impression that he is one. Neither he nor any of his associates should ever be guilty of the least offense against modesty towards the young of either sex who are his subjects, and the women of his family should observe a like self-control towards other women; the insolence of women has ruined many tyrannies." <sup>23</sup>

Aristotle goes on by saying that such a tyrant should be discreet. If he cannot control his lusts, he should at least hide them. He will find religion to be extremely helpful.

"Also he should appear to be particularly earnest in the service of the gods; for if men think that a ruler is religious and has a reverence for the gods, they are less afraid of suffering injustice at his hands, and they are less disposed to conspire against him, because they believe him to have the very gods fighting on his side. At the same time his religion must not be thought foolish. And he should honor men of merit, and make them think that they would not be held in more honor by the citizens if they had a free government. The honor he should distribute himself, but the punishment should be inflicted by officers and courts of law. It is a precaution which is taken by all monarchs not to make one person great; but if one, then two or more should be raised, that they may look sharply after one another. If after all some one has to be made great, he should not be a man of bold spirit; for such dispositions are ever most inclined to strike. And if any one is to be deprived of his power, let it be diminished gradually, not taken from him all at once." <sup>24</sup>

This discussion could scarcely be surpassed in its cynical implications. Aristotle realized that what counts most in political affairs is appearance and that the people are easily deceived. His discussion does not imply that he was a friend of tyranny, for he knew that such a government usually is short-lived and extremely unstable.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1314 a-1314 b.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1314 b-1315 a.

In Book Seven of the *Politics* Aristotle pictured the ideal state. He believed in maintaining a small population because it is more manageable. The territory of the state should be large enough for the means of livelihood to be supplied. It should be distant from a harbor, which Aristotle regarded as a source of immorality. He felt that the moral effects of sea trade are inevitably unfortunate. Besides mechanics, he would exclude merchants and businessmen from citizenship. Only warriors, rulers, and priests should be citizens. In various periods of his life a citizen should be a warrior, a ruler, and a priest. In old age, the citizens may dedicate themselves to speculative philosophy. The population of the city, Aristotle stated, is to contain a harmonious blend of Asiatic and Nordic races. Here again we notice his ideal of the Golden Mean. Excessive property is not to be allowed and usury is to be outlawed. Aristotle, it is clear, was opposed to a profit economy.

He made detailed suggestions regarding the location of the city. Attention should be paid to strategic necessities, to public health, and to political considerations. It would be a mistake, he stated, if beauty were regarded as the only factor, for there is always a danger that war may break out, in which case city walls are of primary importance.

In the last part of the *Politics*, Aristotle turned to education. It is the task of the educator, he believed, to produce the type of citizen who can best function in the ideal state. From birth, children should be watched carefully and guided by the wisest citizens. Special attention must be placed upon cleanliness of mind and body. The games of children should be neither vulgar, nor too fatiguing, nor too soft. If possible, he thought, children's games should be imitations of the activities of later life.

In this educational process the state, according to his plan, supervises almost all activities. The state fixes the age of marriage, superintends the physical condition of the parents, and determines the educational curriculum.

Elaborate attention is to be paid to the *moral education* of the citizens. Students are not to be exposed to pictures and plays which will have a degrading influence on their character, nor is indecency to be allowed. Aristotle thought it only a short step from indecency in language to indecency in acts.

The curriculum should embrace reading, writing, and drawing, as well as music. Physical education is to form the first stage of the educational process, but the teacher must see to it that athletics is

not overemphasized and that physical training does not become a goal in itself. Music, above all, is an excellent instrument of instruction, according to Aristotle. Not only does it serve as a form of recreation, but it is also a moral discipline and leads to a fuller understanding of life. He thought that various harmonies should be used to inspire corresponding moral virtues. Like Plato, he was conscious of the great moral effect of music. All the modes of music are to be employed but not all in the same manner:

"In education the most ethical modes are to be preferred, but in listening to the performances of others we may admit the modes of action and passion also. For feelings such as pity and fear, or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy, whom we see as a result of the sacred melodies—when they have used the melodies that excite the soul to mystic frenzy—restored as though they had found healing and purgation. Those who are influenced by pity or fear, and every emotional nature, must have a like experience, and others in so far as each is susceptible to such emotions, and all are in a manner purged and their souls lightened and delighted. The purgative melodies likewise give an innocent pleasure to mankind. Such are the modes and the melodies in which those who perform music at the theater should be invited to compete. But since the spectators are of two kinds—the one free and educated, and the other a vulgar crowd composed of mechanics, laborers, and the like—there ought to be contests and exhibitions instituted for the relaxation of the second class also."<sup>25</sup>

The goal of Aristotle's educational plan was the enjoyment of leisure. He subordinated the utilitarian aspects of education to its cultural implications. What is necessary, what serves as a preparation for making a living, was not the important consideration for Aristotle, since he felt that all of education is a preparation for aristocratic existence. This view of education dominated 19th-century American educational institutions. Progressive education, according to John Dewey, maintains the opposite outlook. It equates education with life and believes that education is never to be parasitical. Mere culture is regarded with contempt by Dewey, who favors the democratic spirit and complete adjustment to life.

The problem raised by Aristotle regarding the function of education has not been solved. There are many today who believe that America has gone to the other extreme and stresses utility at the

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 1342 a.



expense of rational enjoyment and the cultivation of the intellect. The solution probably lies in a compromise between these two attitudes, in an educational system which develops both a cultured class of leaders and the techniques through which a high standard of living can be achieved.

### ESTHETIC THEORIES

The esthetic theories of Aristotle, as his other views in philosophy, differ markedly from those of Plato. Plato's discussion of art is moralistic and puritanical, and he wanted to banish Homer and Hesiod from his utopia. While Plato regarded art as an inferior part of knowledge, Aristotle believed that art attempts to achieve an understanding of universal essences. This attempt is especially noticeable in poetry, which Aristotle regarded as more philosophical and of greater import than history.

Aristotle did not insist that all art teach a moral lesson. If censorship is imposed, he believed, it only leads to a stifling of creativity. He contended that frequently suppression of certain forms of art is merely instigated by ignorance.

Especially important in Aristotle's view of art is his view of *catharsis*, or the transference of an emotion from ourselves to the hero or the villain of an art form. Let us say our fate is a deplorable one. Naturally we feel self-pity; we are sorry for ourselves. But when we see suffering on the stage, portrayed on a gigantic scale, we are liberated from self-pity and obtain a universal understanding. Art can lift us to a higher level and give us a more comprehensive view of reality.

The highest form of art, in Aristotle's view, is tragedy. He gave various rules for the plot of a tragedy. Three things, though, are to be avoided:

"(1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of tragedy; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves; so that there will be nothing either piteous or fear-inspiring in the situation. There remains, then,

the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity.”<sup>26</sup>

What are the elements of a good plot? Aristotle gave a definite answer:

“The perfect plot, accordingly, must have a single, and not (as some tell us) a double issue; the change in the hero’s fortunes must be not from misery to happiness, but on the contrary from happiness to misery; and the cause of it must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part; the man himself being either such as we have described, or better, not worse, than that.”<sup>27</sup>

The dramatist must also have a knowledge of human character, which is to be portrayed in a *plausible manner*:

“In the characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good. There will be an element of character in the play, if . . . what a personage says or does reveals a certain moral purpose; and a good element of character, if the purpose so revealed is good. Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being. The second point is to make them appropriate. The character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever. The third is to make them like the reality, which is not the same as their being good and appropriate, in our sense of the term. The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout; even if inconsistency be part of the man before one for imitation as presenting that form of character, he should still be consistently inconsistent.”<sup>28</sup>

Aristotle’s main ideal in art was not professionalism. He would not have encouraged our modern trend, in which child prodigies and virtuosos are developed. The primary element in art, he maintained, is an appreciation and understanding of life. Furthermore, he felt that esthetic pleasure varies according to education and social status. Hence, there cannot be one art for all. The lower classes, he said, enjoy a different type of art and are more interested in pleasures which appeal to the senses than in those which appeal to

<sup>26</sup> *Poetics*, ch. 13, 1452 b-1453 a.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 13, 1453 a.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 15, 1454 a.

reason. But Aristotle did not believe art is to be guided by the dictatorship of vulgarity (*i.e.*, Hollywood movies); rather, it is to be determined by the ideals of the best-educated citizens.

### THE INFLUENCE OF ARISTOTLE

It is impossible to do justice to the immeasurable influence which Aristotle had on the history of civilization. In the Middle Ages he was regarded as the master of all knowledge, and he was respected as much in Mohammedan and Jewish circles as in the Christian Church. The philosophy of Aristotle was used by Aquinas to buttress the dogmas of the Church.

When the scholars of the Renaissance re-evaluated Aristotle, they became more skeptical and realized that the Greek philosopher did not believe in the immortality of the individual soul or in the creation of the universe by God. He became the source of much heresy, and an acceptance of his philosophy frequently led to fervent opposition to the ecclesiastical authorities.

Among modern philosophers Leibniz (1646-1716), especially, appreciated the philosophy of Aristotle and like the latter adopted the principle of teleology. Aristotle aided Leibniz to get away from a mechanistic concept of nature and to view the universe in dynamic terms. In France, in the 19th century, the philosophy of Aristotle inspired a reaction against Comte's Positivism. It led, on the part of Renouvier and Ravaisson, to a spiritual hypothesis and a personalistic philosophy of life.

All in all, it can be said without exaggeration that Aristotelian philosophy is probably the most amazing system that has ever been devised in the history of civilization.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss Aristotle's Golden Mean.
2. Enumerate the forms of good government according to Aristotle.
3. Explain the significance of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.
4. What advice did Aristotle give to aspiring orators?
5. How can government best be preserved, according to Aristotle's *Politics*?
6. How realistic were the political views of Aristotle?
7. What is the significance of tragedy according to Aristotle?
8. In what ways did Aristotle influence literary criticism?
9. What are the weaknesses of Aristotle's ethical philosophy?
10. What would be Aristotle's criticism of Marxism?
11. Describe the ideal commonwealth of Aristotle.

## *THE BEGINNING OF HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY*

. . . . .

### *THE POLITICAL SETTING*

**I**t is worth noting that after Aristotle philosophy greatly declined. There was a like decline in the field of politics, when the empire which was created by Alexander was split into several fragments. Alexander occupies almost the same position in political life that Aristotle holds in philosophy.

It was the ideal of Alexander to develop a world empire in which Greeks and Orientals could live side by side. Consequently, he encouraged intermarriage and respected the traditions and the customs of the Oriental nations. During the last years of his life he was so deeply impressed with the East that many of his close followers deserted him, for they thought he was betraying his original ideals. They were justified in their suspicions by Alexander's wild excesses. Given to all kinds of vice, he ruled with Oriental pomp and ceremony and regarded himself as a god who could do no wrong. Constantly, however, he was lenient in his treatment of Athens, and he aided in beautifying and extending the glory of that city.

The death of Alexander was followed by several wars, during which there was incessant struggle for power. After the battle of Ipsus, in 301 B.C., four rulers emerged: Lysimachus, who was king of Thrace and of the western part of Asia Minor; Cassander, king of Macedonia, who claimed complete control over Greece; Seleucus Nicator, who governed Syria and whose realm extended to the Indus; and Ptolemy, who was ruler of Egypt and also laid claim to the sovereignty of Palestine.

Ultimately, however, the kingdom of Lysimachus collapsed, and it was divided among the Syrians and the Macedonians. The other nations, including Pergamum, were more fortunate, and their rule lasted until Rome established its great empire. These kingdoms were agencies of culture diffusion. Through them Greek ideas, Greek art, and Greek philosophy were spread to all parts of the civilized world. Thus, the Hellenistic Age arose, which had a distinctly cosmopolitan and universal flavor.

## INTELLECTUAL TRAITS

The Hellenistic Age witnessed a reaction against metaphysics. Its primary concern was ethical. No attempt was made to see life as a unity and to investigate the entire structure of the cosmos. It was an age in which an intense class struggle took place. The poor were becoming poorer and the rich, especially at Alexandria and at Rhodes, accumulated more money than ever before.

Of all the cities of the Hellenistic Age, Alexandria was especially splendid. It had enormous zoological collections, a library with several hundred thousand volumes, and a university to which scholars came from all over the world. In Alexandria, noted scientists pursued their labors. Among them we find Euclid, working in geometry; Eratosthenes, in geography; Apollonius, in physics and mathematics; and Ptolemy, who gave an authoritative formulation of the geocentric hypothesis.

In this age science replaced metaphysical speculation. A positivistic strain predominated. It led to an interest in quantitative measurement and in functional application, and it discouraged a blind faith on the part of the educated thinker. There was such a lively interchange of ideas that no orthodox opinion could last long; instead, eclecticism became the vogue of the day.

To some extent, there was less creativity than before. While the art of the Hellenic Age had been symbolized by gracefulness, re-

straint, and good taste, Hellenistic art became increasingly more ornate, more bombastic, and more gigantic. Artists were patronized now by wealthy men who wanted to display their possessions and were more interested in impressing their friends than in exhibiting good taste.

In vain do we look for dramatists of the caliber of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides. The primary interest of this period was comedy. Thus Menander specialized in domestic situations and avoided difficult cosmic themes. In Hellenic drama, man's relationship with the gods had been foremost. In the Hellenistic Age, however, there was a predominance of comic situations, and the dramatist was primarily concerned with entertaining his audience.

In summarizing, what were the intellectual trends which characterize the Hellenistic Age?

- (1) A division between philosophy and the sciences took place; learning, as in the 20th century, became increasingly specialized.
- (2) There was a departure from pure speculation, and there was a concentration on *application*. More interest was shown in mechanical inventions than was shown in the Hellenic Age.
- (3) Athens lost its monopoly in learning, and we find new intellectual centers such as Antioch, Rhodes, Pergamum, and Alexandria.
- (4) Philosophy was popularized, attracting a wider audience. There was a tendency on the part of the teacher to ignore the difficult problems of metaphysics and instead to dwell on social problems.
- (5) Ethics became the dominant subject of philosophical inquiry. Now the main problem was how man could best achieve a satisfactory life; philosophers were less interested in cosmology than in moral salvation.
- (6) The spirit of Hellenistic philosophy was *eclectic*. Attempts were made to synthesize and harmonize conflicting viewpoints. These attempts frequently symbolized a lack of intellectual originality.
- (7) There arose a host of philosophical scholars who were mainly interested in research and had no independent theories of their own. Their principal interest was *academic*; as commentators they frequently dwelt on minor and insignificant points of interpretation.
- (8) Extremes emerged in the intellectual life of the Hellenistic

Age. On the one hand, we find extreme superstition; on the other hand, extreme skepticism. In ethics, we find proponents of asceticism and hedonism.

- (9) In this period philosophy was more closely associated with religion than in the Hellenic Age. Many philosophers gave a symbolic and allegorical explanation of religious phenomena. Like the religious leaders, they frequently resorted to proselyting methods.
- (10) The perspective of philosophy and literature was narrowed. Since conditions were so chaotic, immediate ends and immediate ideals were regarded as most important. The present was emphasized above all. Intellectual instability was just as evident as it is in the 20th century. There was an unending succession of intellectual fads, all of which claimed to possess new features, but in reality most of them merely borrowed from the contributions of the past.

### THE MEGARIC SCHOOL AND CYNICISM

Euclid of Megara represents a mixture of Eleatic concepts and the Socratic way of life. As a student of Socrates, he admired the Socratic concept of virtue and felt that evil has no metaphysical reality.

Since he maintained that Being and thinking are one, *monism* is the keynote to his philosophy. What appears as changing and transitory is purely illusory. *The One and the Good were united by Euclid.* How he conceived of the One does not appear too clearly. Occasionally he spoke of it in theistic terms and thus equated it with a personal god; sometimes he regarded the One in impersonal terms.

Among the disciples of Euclid's school we find Stilpo of Megara, who distinguished himself by skepticism in religion. He was considered so subversive in religion that he was banished from Athens. In his ethical ideals we find a strong trace of *intellectualism*. The goal of life he regarded as emancipation from external goods. The wise man, according to Stilpo, will cultivate his own independence and not cherish the illusory values of the masses. Almost Stoic in his philosophical life, he spoke of the virtue of apathy. In his system we find the seeds of the system of Zeno, one of his pupils.

Related to the Megaric tendencies was the philosophy of Phaedo of Elis. As an outstanding student of Socrates, Phaedo mainly repeated the views of his teacher, for he identified virtue with knowledge and considered philosophy the best guide to a rational life.

Like many other thinkers of his age, he felt that society was in a state of decay and that philosophy had an ethical function.

Menedemus of Eretria is a vague figure in ancient philosophy. He left no writings, and thus it is impossible to give an exact account of his teachings. But, it appears, he strongly attacked the superstitions of the masses and believed in an emancipated way of life. Hedonism seemed to him an inadequate philosophy, hence he urged the cultivation of man's intellectual capacities.

The reaction against hedonism was represented most clearly by the Cynic philosophers. They stressed the cultivation of virtue, which they regarded as an absolute Good. They believed that society was in a decadent state; that the only hope for man was to cultivate his inner self. Their scientific interests were almost non-existent. Like Rousseau, they thought scientific knowledge prevents man from attaining true morality.

The Cynics made a vigorous attack on all social and civilizing institutions. Marriage they regarded as an evil which makes man dependent on emotional security. They abhorred property, for it creates inequality. They detested political organization, for it leads to oppression and wars. They did not believe in nationalism, since they believed that man is a universal citizen and thus cannot find himself by membership in any one nation.

They objected to all external values. Those who believe in fame, the Cynics concluded, are deluded, for it is of no lasting value. As for wealth, it merely creates wickedness. Most of all, however, they attacked man's reliance on pleasures, for life based on physical sensations cannot lead to the cultivation of virtue. The Cynics were moral athletes who tried to strengthen their souls in the same way as an athlete builds up his body.

Intellectually, the Cynics were nominalists. Nominalism was quite consistent with their view that all universal institutions are bad and that the individual alone is the judge of his needs. No laws, no commandments, no pre-established beliefs can coerce him.

Among the Cynic philosophers we find Antisthenes, *c.* 445-365 B.C., whose mother was a Thracian slave and who was constantly ridiculed by Plato. He contradicted Plato, who believed in universals, for he felt that only individual facts are real. To him, Socrates represented the Cynic view of life, and, like the latter, he was interested primarily in virtue.

Another outstanding Cynic was Diogenes, who taught the Cynic doctrines in a spectacular way. His father was a banker, but Diog-



enes had no respect for wealth. His adult years were spent in Athens and Corinth, where he became one of the noted citizens. His ideal was the life of animals, because it is completely free of human follies.

One of his pupils was Crates of Thebes, who was extremely wealthy but so impressed by the Cynic ideal of life that he devoted himself to a life of poverty. He represented a very warm and human aspect of the Cynic school and in his teachings exemplified the rule of compassion.

### CYRENAIC PHILOSOPHERS

Quite different from the Cynic philosophers were the Cyrenaic thinkers. They believed in pleasure rather than narrow independence, and most of them were men of the world who abhorred the antisocial activities of the Cynics.

What are the main features of the Cyrenaic philosophy? First, individualism. The individual, according to the Cyrenaics, is the judge of what things are really pleasant. They were even more nominalistic than their Cynic opponents and thus reacted strongly against Plato's emphasis on universals.

Second, most of them emphasized that the only real pleasure is bodily pleasure. It is foolish, they said, to neglect the body, which can give us such great enjoyment.

Third, they did not believe in waiting for a future life or for future fulfillment. Great pleasure can be obtained *now*, they claimed; consequently they regarded the immediate pleasure as the most significant.

Among the Cyrenaic philosophers we find certain variations in doctrine. Aristippus, the founder of the school, was a student of Socrates. Cosmopolitan and urbane, Aristippus enjoyed all the pleasures of civilization. He knew how to handle the tyrants of his time, and he did not hesitate to inflate their ego if flattery served his purpose. Since he never believed in saving money, he used it to buy himself fashionable clothes and expensive food, and to enjoy the companionship of a variety of women. His view of philosophy was quite simple. To him philosophy was not the study of reality nor a subject dealing with immaterial truth, but merely a branch of learning which best teaches us how to *enjoy ourselves*.

Among Aristippus' students we find Theodorus, who was regarded as an atheist, for he believed religion is of no real value. He specialized in teaching the importance of prudence and expediency.

Hegesias represents a Schopenhauerian conclusion to Cyrenaicism. Realizing that in life we are exposed to a thousand frustrations, he stated that the best attitude is one of complete pessimism. The multitude believes in happiness, yet, Hegesias thought, such a condition can never be reached. He was a popular lecturer at Alexandria, but his pessimistic teachings were taken too literally and many of his listeners committed suicide. Finally the ruler of Egypt prohibited him from continuing these lectures.

### THE ACADEMY

After the death of Plato, his school of philosophy was continued by his followers, but it lacked philosophical vitality.<sup>1</sup> Conventionally, the Platonic school is divided into three periods. The first is the period of the Old Academy, which lasted from 347 B.C. to 250 B.C. In this period we find several noteworthy philosophers.

First there was Speusippus, who interpreted the doctrine of Ideas according to the theory of numbers. He was little interested in the natural sciences, and his philosophy was dominated by the Pythagorean spirit.

Then came Xenocrates, who developed a theory of dualism. He believed in an evil world-soul and thought there were intermediaries between the divine and the material world. In this doctrine he influenced the development of Neo-Platonism.

Heraclides of Pontus, more learned than Xenocrates, was interested in the physical sciences and made several contributions to astronomy.

Philip of Opus, according to some critics, was the author of *Epinomis*. As the editor of Plato's *Laws*, he was interested in academic scholarship. In his system he stressed the evil world-soul and accepted the existence of demons. He looked upon human existence from a pessimistic viewpoint.

The period of the Old Academy closes with Crates and Crantor, who both specialized in the consideration of ethical ideals.

The Middle Academy was distinguished by a skeptical spirit. Its main representatives were Arcesilaus and Carneades, who both believed there is no absolute truth and so were guided by the standard of probability. Their contributions will be discussed in detail in the chapter on Skepticism.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stein, *Sieben Bücher zur Geschichte des Platonismus*; Ueberweg, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1: Zeller, *Outlines of the history of Greek philosophy*; Leisegang, *Hellenistische Philosophie*.

The New Academy abandoned the skepticism of these two philosophers and was more faithful to the theory of Plato. Among the thinkers of the New Academy we find Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon, who combined Platonism with Stoic elements. Both leaned in the direction of an eclectic philosophy, especially Antiochus, who tried to harmonize conflicting viewpoints and show that the great thinkers had agreed on many essential points.

### ARISTOTLE'S FOLLOWERS—THE PERIPATETICS

The school of Aristotle, like that of Plato, experienced a great decline after the death of its founder.<sup>2</sup> The immediate follower of Aristotle was Theophrastus, who was head of the Lyceum for over thirty-five years. Encyclopedic, like his master, he was especially interested in the science of botany. In his works, especially in his *Ethical characters*, he displays a secular spirit. He was penetrating in his denunciation of superstition:

"Superstition would seem to be simply cowardice in regard to the supernatural.

"The superstitious man is one who will wash his hands at a fountain, sprinkle himself from a temple font, put a bit of laurel leaf into his mouth, and so go about for the day. If a weasel runs across his path, he will not pursue his walk until someone else has traversed the road, or until he has thrown three stones across it. . . . He will pour oil from his flask on the smooth stones at the crossroads, as he goes by, and will fall on his knees and worship them before he departs. If a mouse gnaws through a mealbag, he will go to the expounder of sacred law and ask what is to be done; and, if the answer is, 'give it to a cobbler to stitch up,' he will disregard this counsel, and go his way, and expiate the omen by sacrifice. He is apt, also, to purify his house frequently, alleging that Hecate has been brought into it by spells: and, if an owl is startled by him in his walk, he will exclaim 'Glory be to Athene!' before he proceeds. He will not tread upon a tombstone, or come near a dead body or a woman defiled by childbirth, saying that it is expedient for him not to be polluted. . . . When he has seen a vision, he will go to the interpreters of dreams, the seers, the augurs, to ask them to what god or goddess he ought to pray. Every month he will repair to the priests of the Orphic Mysteries, to partake in their rites, accompanied by his wife, or (if

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lyngg, *Die Peripatetische Schule*; Windelband, *History of ancient philosophy*; Shute, *History of the Aristotelian writings*.

she is too busy) by his children and their nurse. He would seem, too, to be of those who are scrupulous in sprinkling themselves with seawater; and, if ever he observes anyone feasting on the garlic at the crossroads, he will go away, pour water over his head, and, summoning the priestesses, bid them carry a squill or a puppy round him for purification. And, if he sees a maniac or an epileptic man, he will shudder and spit into his bosom."<sup>3</sup>

Of Eudemus of Rhodes we know very little. In his philosophy he exhibited little originality and followed closely the teachings of Aristotle.

Aristoxenus of Tarentum tried to combine Aristotelian philosophy with that of Pythagoras. He elaborated, especially, upon the theory of musical numbers and improved the concept of harmony fundamental in Aristotle's system. He denied the immortality of the soul.

Strato of Lampsacus, unlike Aristoxenus, was primarily interested in the study of nature. His approach to science was *mechanistic*, and he neglected the teleological concepts of Aristotle.

Demetrius of Phalerus, who turned to history, was eclectic in his philosophy. His interests were mainly scholarly, and he collected the opinions of his predecessors. He industriously promoted the scientific work at Alexandria.

The later Peripatetics included Andronicus of Rhodes, who was an editor of the works of Aristotle and particularly interested in the latter's pedagogical writings. He achieved a high standard of scholarship in his critical study of Aristotelian source material. His spirit was naturalistic, and we find the same tendency in his pupil, Boethus of Sidon.

Aristocles of Messana approached Stoic thinking by his concept of the divine mind, the principle of reality which is the source of all truth and all values. We find a *pantheistic* strain in his philosophy, a divergence from the views of Aristotle.

Alexander of Aphrodisias was more scientific in his approach to philosophy. He denied the immortality of the soul and did not accept the concept of teleology. In his epistemology he emphasized nominalism and maintained that universals exist only in our minds.

In the 6th century A.D., Philoponus and Simplicius did much critical work in interpreting the meaning of Aristotelian philosophy. Both asserted that Aristotle identified the individual soul with the active reason.

<sup>3</sup> *Characteres*, xxviii (xvi), Webster, *Historical selections*, pp. 323-324.

With all these philosophers speculative thinking was secondary; their main interest lay in collecting the opinions of their predecessors. It can be seen that the school of Aristotle failed to maintain a high standard of philosophical investigation. As time progressed, it attracted second-rate scholars who lacked originality and independence in their opinions.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the social currents which produced Hellenistic civilization?
2. Explain the significance of the Megarics.
3. Discuss the ethical views of the Cynics.
4. Why did the Cynics object to convention?
5. Who were the leaders of the Cynic movement?
6. How did the Cynics view the problem of universals?
7. Compare the Cyrenaics with the Cynics.
8. Who were the leaders of the Cyrenaics?
9. What did Aristippus say regarding pleasure?
10. What are the weaknesses of Cyrenaic philosophy?
11. Trace the development of Platonic philosophy.
12. Describe the progress of Aristotelian philosophy.

# THE CHALLENGE OF EPICUREANISM

. . . . .

## THE SOURCES

**T**he philosophy of Epicureanism was developed under the impact of a variety of sources. This statement does not imply that it was not an original movement and that it merely borrowed, for, on the contrary, Epicureanism represents one of the highlights of ancient philosophy.

Especially influential in the development of Epicureanism were the Atomists. In fact, the Atomic philosophy served as the foundation of Epicurus' writings. As we remember, Democritus had developed a system based on a mechanical interpretation of the universe. Refusing to accept any type of spiritual foundation, he did not accept the concepts of immortality, a spiritual soul, or divine Providence. To some extent he scandalized the Greek mind by the doctrine of the void and the reduction of everything in the universe to the movement of atoms.

The more we study the system of the Atomists, the more we realize how modern it is. It contains no trace of supernaturalism. It

is not concerned with abstruse explanations; rather, it gives a simple and consistent explanation of the basic structure of the universe.

Ethically, also, the philosophy of Democritus is significant. It regards pleasure as the great goal, not a physical type of enjoyment but, rather, intellectual stimulation. It speaks of the wise man who sees through the shallow occupations of mankind and lives a truly meaningful life. Upholding the ideal of cheerfulness, it is a philosophy which abhors asceticism and mortification of the flesh.

Besides the system of the Atomists, the Sophist philosophy had an impact on Epicureanism, but the influence of the Sophists was more indirect and less pronounced than that of the Atomists. The Sophists believed in sensation as the standard of knowledge, and they turned against religious absolutism. So, too, did the Epicureans, but they were more interested in science than were the Sophists. Furthermore, the Epicureans placed less emphasis upon the relativity of knowledge. Still, it must be remembered that the Epicureans, like the Sophists, did not believe in rationalism and that their standard of truth was likewise severely empirical.

The most immediate influence on Epicurean philosophy came through the Cyrenaics, who were frank and consistent in their belief that pleasure is the goal of life. They deliberately ignored any philosophy which stresses virtue as an end in itself and regards life as a pilgrimage and a valley of tears. They taught that life is to be enjoyed to the utmost; and, as we have seen, they believed particularly in bodily pleasures. Good food, elegant clothing, luxurious homes, abundance of wealth—these were the Goods which were most desired by this group of thinkers.

Intellectually, however, the Cyrenaic movement was handicapped by its extreme nominalism and lack of scientific knowledge. It never worked out a complex system of metaphysics which could substantiate its ethical system. In short, it was a rather superficial theory of life, which had little appeal to man's esthetic and spiritual capacities.

The irony is that Epicureanism has often been interpreted according to the tenets of Cyrenaicism. Constantly we hear charges that Epicureanism is a philosophy which degrades man and reduces him to his physiological drives. But we must be conscious of the enormous differences between the two movements. Epicureanism is far more intellectual, far more systematized, and far more complicated than the Cyrenaic philosophy. Its system of ethics is founded on scientific ideals; we can almost speak of a religion of science in Epicureanism.

To appreciate the sources of the Epicurean movement we must also understand the social currents responsible for its development. Representing a bitter opposition to the popular concepts of religion, it was a protest against all forms of superstition. We must remember that in Hellenistic times the purity of Greek religion had disintegrated. The Mediterranean world accepted all kinds of deities; revival preachers had huge audiences, and the ignorant were only too eager to believe in miracles.

To the Epicureans such an attitude was not worthy of the human being. They realized that if it triumphed there could be no rational philosophy, no naturalistic art, and no intellectual culture. Thus, they regarded themselves as emancipators and were vigorous in their struggle against obscurantism and intellectual regression.

### EPICURUS

We have few facts regarding the career of Epicurus. He was born *c.* 341 B.C. on the island of Samos, where his father had gone as an Athenian colonist. His father was a schoolteacher, and from him he learned the rudiments of education. We are told that his mother was a seller of charms and holy relics and that Epicurus helped her in her profession. We do not know if the story is true, but if it is, it explains why Epicurus felt such hatred for popular religion.

In 323 we find Epicurus in Athens, where he obtained military training and took part in the political affairs of the community. In this period he met the poet Menander. This was probably a very formative stage in his philosophical development. Athenian philosophy was already experiencing a twilight, and only second-rate figures were teaching in the Lyceum. No wonder that Epicurus had contempt for many of the philosophers! He satirized both Plato and Aristotle, and he called Heraclitus a "confusion-maker."

Shortly after 323 B.C. Epicurus left Athens and traveled widely. He became a teacher of philosophy and in 310 established a school of philosophy at Mitylene. Yet he was homesick for Athens; hence, four years later, he moved back to that city, which then became the center of his activity.

In Athens Epicurus explained his philosophy in a garden which has become extremely famous in the history of philosophy. His teaching was informal, and not only free men but women and slaves were allowed to attend. Epicurus must have made an unusual impression on his hearers, for they all testify to his intellectual strength, sharp wit, and convincing arguments. He never married, since he



thought that a wife would interfere with his philosophy. Besides, he had too much faith in friendship and too little faith in love. But he was a man with tender human feelings. The letters which have been preserved show his unflagging interest in the affairs of his students. When one of his disciples died and left a son and a daughter, Epicurus took care of their education and in his will provided for them.

Throughout his life he was an industrious writer. Over three hundred treatises are ascribed to him. His great book *On nature* was written in thirty-seven volumes. Unfortunately we have only a few fragments of his work. In his style Epicurus was less elegant than Plato. While he lacked poetic imagination, his clarity is admirable. He expressed himself in a comprehensive and succinct manner.

In his later years Epicurus suffered greatly from ill health. He had never been strong; even as a young boy he had endured a variety of diseases. As he grew older, gout and indigestion plagued him; but he never lost his cheerfulness. On the last day of his life he wrote a letter to one of his disciples, in which he described his pain and the weariness of his tortured body, but his spirit was still the same as he recalled a past conversation they had enjoyed.

Thus, it can be seen, Epicurus was sincere in his beliefs, and his philosophy was not merely a theory of life but a way of action. Living frugally, he despised luxuries. He had no desire to reform the world, and he was not interested in creating social utopias but was satisfied in searching for the meaning of existence, in teaching real wisdom, and in living a tranquil life.

### EPICURUS' THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The starting point of Epicurus' epistemology is his belief in *sensation*. Unlike Plato, he thought the senses trustworthy. Illusion is not derived from them, he wrote, but rather from our inability to interpret them correctly. But, it may be objected, the senses often present us with a false picture of reality. For example, the senses do not indicate that the earth moves nor do they tell us anything about the relativity of time and space. Epicurus, however, said we should not blame the senses but our own hasty interpretation of them. Since he believed in perception as a valid guide in intellectual knowledge, his system is thoroughly empirical. With this attitude he could not accept *a priori* truths and vague generalizations. Knowledge, he taught, does not depend so much on reason as on sense perception. Like modern scientists, he urged tentative evaluations and tentative conclusions.

The question arises, How do we know the external world exists? How can we be certain that Nature is not merely a realm of illusion? Epicurus answered, we can rely on sensations which tell us that phenomena exist. Furthermore, we can be certain that the feelings which we experience subjectively are not part of illusion but do have reality. Notice how the standpoint of Epicurus differs from that of Plato. There is no dualism between reason and sensation in Epicurus. Nor is there an opposition between the world of change and the world of the Forms. While Plato believed in reason as the standard of truth, Epicurus believed in sense experience. He felt that without sense knowledge there would be complete uncertainty and confusion. For the sake of argument let us state that sense knowledge is not trustworthy. What can we choose as a standard? Reason? But reason depends on sense experience, Epicurus would say. Intuition? This capacity likewise depends on perception.

"If you fight against all your sensations, you will have no standard to which to refer, and thus no means of judging even those judgments which you pronounce false.

"If you reject absolutely any single sensation without stopping to discriminate with respect to that which awaits confirmation between matter of opinion and that which is already present, whether in sensation or in feelings or in any presentative perception of the mind, you will throw into confusion even the rest of your sensations by your groundless belief and so you will be rejecting the standard of truth altogether. If in your ideas based upon opinion you hastily affirm as true all that awaits confirmation as well as that which does not, you will not escape error, as you will be maintaining complete ambiguity whenever it is a case of judging between right and wrong opinion."<sup>1</sup>

Another problem arises. How can we arrive at a general concept? How can we establish scientific knowledge? Epicurus answered that sense impressions are repeated, and this repetition develops general notions which are the foundations of our opinions. Truth then implies a correspondence between our opinion and the processes of the external world, while error stands for an invalid interpretation of phenomena.

Is reason autonomous? Can reason develop without sense perception? Epicurus answered in the negative, for he thought the tests of reason must be checked by experience and sense knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of eminent philosophers*, 11, Bk. x. Hicks' translation (*Loeb classical library series*), 146-147.

Another problem arises. The skeptic will say that the Epicurean system rests on facts which we do not perceive; for example, the atoms are invisible. How do we know they exist? Epicurus replied that in this case we must rely on analogy, on indirect verification, for sensation can establish *nothing* which would disprove the existence of the atoms.

To explain the process of sensation Epicurus spoke of films which are emitted by the objects of sense:

"Again, there are outlines or films, which are of the same shape as solid bodies, but of a thinness far exceeding that of any object we see. For it is not impossible that there should be found in the surrounding air combinations of this kind, materials adapted for expressing the hollowness and thinness of surfaces, and effluxes preserving the same relative position and motion which they had in the solid objects from which they come. To these films we give the name of 'images' or 'idols.' Furthermore, so long as nothing comes in the way to offer resistance, motion through the void accomplishes any imaginable distance in an inconceivably short time. For resistance encountered is the equivalent of slowness, its absence the equivalent of speed.

"... The exceeding thinness of the images is contradicted by none of the facts under our observation. Hence also their velocities are enormous, since they always find a void passage to fit them. Besides, their incessant effluence meets with no resistance, or very little, although many atoms, not to say an unlimited number, do at once encounter resistance."<sup>2</sup>

Epicurus also discussed the production of these images. Apparently they are formed with *great rapidity*. "For particles are continually streaming off from the surface of bodies, though no diminution of the bodies is observed, because other particles take their place. And those given off for a long time retain the position and arrangement which their atoms had when they formed part of the solid bodies, although occasionally they are thrown into confusion. Sometimes such films are formed very rapidly in the air, because they need not have any solid content; and there are other modes in which they may be formed. For there is nothing in all this which is contradicted by sensation, if we in some sort look at the clear evidence of sense, to which we should also refer the continuity of particles in the objects external to ourselves."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

As is clear, we do not see the object directly, but only its images. The optical process thus is indirect. We are not in immediate contact with the objects of the external world, for we see only reflections of them. Still, our knowledge is reliable, just as we can trust that a portrait is a copy of the original man which it is designed to describe. "We must also consider that it is by the entrance of something coming from external objects that we see their shapes and think of them. For external things would not stamp on us their own nature of color and form through the medium of the air which is between them and us, or by means of rays of light or currents of any sort going from us to them, so well as by the entrance into our eyes or minds, to whichever their size is suitable, of certain films coming from the things themselves, these films or outlines being of the same color and shape as the external things themselves. They move with rapid motion; and this again explains why they present the appearance of the single continuous object, and retain the mutual interconnection which they had in the object, when they impinge upon the sense, such impact being due to the oscillation of the atoms in the interior of the solid object from which they come."<sup>4</sup>

Epicurus made it clear that falsehood and error depend upon *hasty* opinion. In the process of inference we must not jump to conclusions, and we must be patient in trying to confirm facts. Furthermore, we must understand the exact nature of the original perception. Very often we arrive at false conclusions because we do not interpret this original perception correctly. Also, feelings within ourselves tend to distort the picture of reality. In a word, the wise man will be careful in reducing his knowledge to the original sense perception and in constantly checking the inferences by which he has arrived at a certain conclusion.

### THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

It is interesting to note that Epicurus rejected the training which was offered in the schools of philosophy. The Platonic Academy, we remember, recommended especially mathematics, but Epicurus had little use for this subject. Logic, which had been cherished by Aristotle, he likewise disregarded. In fact, for deductive logic Epicurus had profound contempt. He thought that too much preoccupation with logic would lead to false pretensions and give the mind an exaggerated power of its own range. Thought, he asserted, should

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

be *applied*; and its object must be the external world, not abstruse propositions.

Thus Epicurus demanded less of his students than did either Plato or Aristotle. He was satisfied if his disciples knew the fundamentals of their letters and had open and acquisitive minds.

As for rhetoric, which the Sophists had emphasized, Epicurus said this might be excellent training for politicians but is of little value for philosophers. The study of literature, which was part of the standard Athenian curriculum, he likewise viewed lightly. It only clutters up the mind with useless details, he decided, and leads to a pedantic attitude which worries more about the grammar of Homer than the correct way of life.

Thus it can be seen that Epicurus thought philosophy mainly an ethical study. He included physical science in it, not because he had an overwhelming curiosity regarding the nature of the universe but because physical science is a valuable aid in emancipating us from ancient superstitions and fears.

The study of philosophy was an immensely practical matter to Epicurus. It is not to be delayed until a man is very old, for it is worth while both for the young and for those advanced in age: "Let no one be slow to seek wisdom when he is young nor weary in the search thereof when he is grown old. For no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. And to say that the season for studying philosophy has not come, or that it is past and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness is not yet or that it is now no more. Therefore, both old and young ought to seek wisdom, the former in order that, as age comes over him, he may be young in good things because of the grace of what has been, and the latter in order that, while he is young, he may at the same time be old, because he has no fear of the things which are to come. So we must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and if that be absent, all our actions are directed toward attaining it."<sup>5</sup>

The more we advance in philosophy, Epicurus taught, the more we are able to confront life with tranquillity. True knowledge liberates, widens our perspective, and leads to a genuine appreciation of the universe. True knowledge, however, cannot be gained merely through quantitative studies and pedantic scholarship; rather, it depends upon the cultivation of a serene attitude through which the pains of life and the reverses of our existence can be overcome.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

### EPICURUS' THEORY OF REALITY

The foundation of the metaphysical system of Epicurus was the system of Democritus but, unlike the latter, Epicurus used the Atomic theory to bolster up his ethics. His scientific proclivities thus were subordinated to his moral interests. The starting point of Epicurus is materialistic. Nothing is created out of the non-existent; this theory denies spontaneous generation. He affirmed that matter always exists and we can understand phenomena only by learning their natural causes.

Did Epicurus teach that matter can decrease? The answer is in the negative. We cannot speak of destruction in the universe, said he; elements merely change their composition. Thus the content of the world remains the same; it is a self-existent and autonomous whole. This view invalidates any belief in a spiritual creator. Epicurus thought that we need no external force to account for the structure of the universe, for it is not subject to generation or decay and its processes can be understood through science, not through theological ideals.

The two basic realities of Epicurus' system are *atoms* and *motion*. Atoms he described as being indivisible, unchangeable, and completely compact. They have three qualities—size, shape, and weight.

Note that Epicurus did not consider the secondary qualities of the atoms to be real; hence they do not possess color or taste. These qualities we attribute to them because of our own interpretation. "Moreover, we must hold that the atoms in fact possess none of the qualities belonging to things which come under our observation, except shape, weight, and size, and the properties necessarily conjoined with shape. For every quality changes, but the atoms do not change, since, when the composite bodies are dissolved, there must needs be a permanent something, solid and indissoluble, left behind, which makes change possible; not changes into or from the non-existent, but often through differences of arrangement, and sometimes through additions and subtractions of the atoms. Hence these somethings capable of being diversely arranged must be indestructible, exempt from change, but possessed each of its own distinctive mass and configuration. This must remain.

"For in the case of changes of configuration within our experience the figure is supposed to be inherent when other qualities are stripped off, but the qualities are not supposed, like the shape which is left behind, to inhere in the subject of change, but to vanish alto-

gether from the body. Thus then, what is left behind is sufficient to account for the differences in composite bodies, since something at least must necessarily be left remaining and be immune from annihilation."<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that Epicurus emphasized the existence of the void. Each atom, he thought, is separated from the rest by empty space, and both atoms and space always exist. He maintained that the sum of things in the universe is infinite. "Again, the sum of things is infinite. For what is finite has an extremity, and the extremity of anything is discerned only by comparison with something else. (Now the sum of things is not discerned by comparison with anything else:) hence, since it has no extremity it has no limit, it must be unlimited or infinite.

"Moreover, the sum of things is unlimited both by reason of the multitude of the atoms and the extent of the void. For if the void were infinite and bodies finite, the bodies would not have stayed anywhere but would have been dispersed in their course through the infinite void, not having any supports or counterchecks to send them back on their upward rebound. Again, if the void were finite, the infinity of bodies would not have anywhere to be."<sup>7</sup>

All changes in the universe are due to the atoms, which are in continual motion. "Furthermore, the atoms, which have no void in them—out of which composite bodies arise and into which they are dissolved—vary indefinitely in their shapes; for so many varieties of things as we see could never have arisen out of a recurrence of a definite number of the same shapes.

"... The atoms are in continual motion through all eternity. . . . Some of them rebound to a considerable distance from each other, while others merely oscillate in one place when they chance to have got entangled or to be enclosed by a mass of other atoms shaped for entangling."<sup>8</sup>

The important feature of the metaphysical system of Epicurus is his belief that the atoms have *free will*. As they are moving around in the world, they swerve from their paths. Their motion causes a collision. As a result of this collision compounds arise, and definite world systems are born. In this theory Epicurus differed markedly from Democritus, who believed everything to be governed by necessity. At first glance it makes the Epicurean system inconsistent.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

In fact, many ancient commentators, especially Cicero, thought it almost invalidated its basic presuppositions.

But, it must be remembered, Epicurus did not believe in absolute necessity, for if we accept such determinism there can be no place for moral teachings. To make the matter clear let us imagine that a predetermined path governs all our actions. Would this not result in fatalism and in passive resignation to nature?

From a scientific standpoint, the swerving of the atoms proved to be useful to Epicurus. He thought that the heavier atoms naturally would fall at a more rapid rate than the lighter atoms. Now there could be no contact between the two if we accept absolute determinism; and no world system could arise. However, the swerving of the atoms, undetermined by external necessity, shows why the planets arose in the universe.

This stress on indeterminism has important implications. It indicates that Epicurus refused to believe in an absolute system of science. Not being willing to be bound by religious orthodoxy, he likewise refused to accept a fatalistic physical science. Freedom to him was real both in the cosmic structure and in the acts of the individual. This view, strangely enough, has been verified by modern science. Heisenberg's theory of indeterminacy has almost an Epicurean flavor, and it shows that mechanical causality is not valid in the study of nuclear physics.

Epicurus also suggested by his doctrine that an infinite number of worlds exist. In this view he was quite consistent, for it was based on his belief in the infinity of atoms and the infinity of space. Some of the worlds, he held, are unlike our own, while others resemble our universe rather closely.

### DOCTRINE OF RELIGION

It is a mistake to think of Epicurus as an atheist, for he maintained that the gods exist but live far away and are unconcerned with human destiny. In short, they are quite different from the orthodox concept, which pictured them as being in constant contact with man. He asserted that their form is everlasting but their material contents transitory and composed of atoms which move in the void. These atoms unite for a moment and then enter into other combinations. They give off certain films or "idols" which are perceived by human beings and which can be trusted when they tell us that gods exist.



Epicurus made it clear that the gods live a completely peaceful life. They have no desires which cannot be fulfilled; they are not exposed to the vicissitudes of suffering. In short, they exemplify the aspirations and ideals of Epicureanism. His concept of religion, he indicated, was quite different from that of the multitude.

"For verily there are gods, and the knowledge of them is manifest; but they are not such as the multitude believe, seeing that men do not steadfastly maintain the notions they form respecting them. Not the man who denies the gods worshiped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them is truly impious. For the utterances of the multitude about the gods are not true preconceptions but false assumptions; hence it is that the greatest evils happen to the wicked and the greatest blessings happen to the good from the hand of the gods, seeing that they are always favorable to their own good qualities and take pleasure in men like unto themselves, but reject as alien whatever is not of their kind."<sup>9</sup>

How then are we to conceive of the gods? Epicurus believed we must first of all get away from the view that the gods know emotion. They are not touched by anger or wrath. They are completely unlike Jehovah, for Epicurus thought emotion a sign of weakness which certainly would disturb the peace of mind of the gods. In his opinion, those who believe then that the gods will reward the virtuous and punish the wicked are mistaken, for gods are not concerned with human actions. They do not take part in human affairs; such activity would detract from their majesty and self-sufficiency. Hence it is useless to pray to the gods; they will not respond. In other words, they are complete isolationists; but their lack of response is not to be interpreted as a sign of their weakness but rather as a sign of their *perfection*.

What happens, then, to orthodox religion? The answer of Epicurus is: It is usually based on fraud and deception, for it pictures a universe in which the gods intervene and men try to please the gods. The philosopher, however, will overcome this illusion and order his actions, not according to vain beliefs but according to the precepts of wisdom.

Epicurus felt that in replacing orthodoxy by this new concept of life he actually had achieved a more pious perspective. Was this not a faith based on freedom rather than on spiritual slavery? Was this not worthy of a rational human being rather than a savage?

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

He was so deeply impressed by the evils of conventional religion that he constantly dwelt on them. So, too, did Lucretius, his great Roman follower. If most prayers were answered, Epicurus noted, they would only result in evil, for men constantly pray for their neighbors to be punished. He reminded us that orthodox religion is frequently based on barbarian rites which are cruel and sadistic in their inhumanity.

The view of the gods which we find in Epicurus and Lucretius makes teleology untenable. Lucretius, like Epicurus, showed that this world is not perfect and that everywhere we can find weaknesses and flaws. Nature is forever our enemy. We struggle against ferocious beasts, and frequently we are exposed to storms, earthquakes, and pestilences. Certainly these vicissitudes do not indicate divine care. Furthermore, Lucretius demonstrated, the gods are perfectly happy. Why then should they create a world which can contribute nothing to perfection? Incidentally, he thought it impossible for them to have created a world out of nothing, because matter cannot be created out of the non-existent.

Following their naturalistic assumptions, the Epicureans taught that the soul is material. It is made up of four elements—heat, air, vapor, and a fourth element which they called nameless. The last is responsible for the intellectual functions of the soul. This distinction between the rational and the irrational part of the soul is especially marked in Lucretius. The rational part, he claimed, is located in the breast while the irrational part, which is lower and less important, is diffused throughout the body.

The question arises, How does the soul differ from other material things? Is it a spiritual entity? Is it independent of the body? Epicurus did not think so. While he conceded that the soul is made up of very fine and smooth atomic particles and lighter than the body, it nevertheless perishes with the body. "Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience; therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life an illimitable time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality. . . . Foolish, therefore, is the man who says that he fears death, not because it will pain when it comes, but because it pains in the prospect. Whatsoever causes no annoyance when it is present, causes only a groundless pain in the expectation. Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we

are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer. But in the world, at one time men shun death as the greatest of all evils, and at another time choose it as a respite from the evils in life. The wise man does not deprecate life nor does he fear the cessation of life."<sup>10</sup>

What matters then is not how long we live but how pleasant our existence is. If we keep this idea in mind, death has no terrors. Those who state that life has no value at all, that it is better not to be born, are hypocrites. If they truly believe this, why do they not commit suicide? If they say it without sincerity, their words are not to be taken seriously.

### ETHICS

In Epicurus' system of ethics, as in his scientific concepts, naturalism prevails. Thus the basis of his ethical concept is not an absolute ideal but concrete observation. He called pleasure the beginning and end of life: it becomes the standard for the good and the criterion for men's actions. This concept, however, does not include bodily pleasures, for we observe that frequently they cause only pain. For example, if we eat too much, indigestion results. If we seek too much sensual pleasure, we are in a state of weakness and fatigue and ultimately experience satiation. Furthermore, if we seek bodily pleasures too intently, we will constantly be agitated. Our minds will be restless, forever seeking more stimulations without being able to achieve contentment. But this is not the way of the wise man who cherishes tranquillity, repose, and serenity—a condition which Epicurus called *ataraxia*.

The end of our actions is freedom from pain and fear. Such freedom indicates the end of our moral search. No longer are we exposed to emotional tempests and to the changing moods of fortune.

It must be realized that Epicurus based his conclusions on his study of the psychology of desires. The more we multiply our desires, he thought, the less likely we are to find repose and tranquillity. We must concentrate on those desires which are *necessary* and *essential* for our well-being. As for those which are admired by the crowd, they are purely superfluous and we can neglect them. In other words, not all pleasure is to be chosen just as not all pain is to be averted:

"It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-126.

be judged. Sometimes we treat the good as an evil, and the evil, on the contrary, as a good. Again, we regard independence of outward things as a great good, not so as in all cases to use little, but so as to be contented with little if we have not much, being honestly persuaded that they have the sweetest enjoyment of luxury who stand least in need of it, and that whatever is natural is easily procured and only the vain and worthless hard to win. Plain fare gives as much pleasure as a costly diet, when once the pain of want has been removed, while bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure when they are brought to hungry lips. To habituate one's self, therefore, to simple and inexpensive diet supplies all that is needful for health, and enables a man to meet the necessary requirements of life without shrinking, and it places us in a better condition when we approach at intervals a costly fare and renders us fearless of fortune."<sup>11</sup>

Epicurus was succinct in describing the meaning of pleasure. It is not to be thought of as prodigality or as wild dissipation. "By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of revelry, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life, it is a sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest tumults take possession of the soul. Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is prudence. Wherefore prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy; from it spring all the other virtues, for it teaches that we cannot lead a life of pleasure which is not also a life of prudence, honor, and justice; nor lead a life of prudence, honor, and justice, which is not also a life of pleasure. For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them."<sup>12</sup>

To accomplish the goal of his moral ideals, Epicurus attacked the values of the multitude; he especially condemned avarice. Great wealth, he showed, frequently brings about not tranquillity but restlessness. We believe that money will solve our problems only to find out that they have been multiplied. The same holds true of honor and power. We think we are secure when we achieve a high position in life; but the opposite is true, for power is unstable. We are admired one day and hated the next. We have friends if we can give them something they want, and we are friendless if we lose our hold

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-131.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132.

on power. Moreover, such power creates envy, which is the cause of much anxiety.

Above all, Epicurus taught, we must not be guided by our fears; if we are, we will be completely unstable. We will forever worry and fret and wait for imaginary disasters. We must neither be afraid of the gods nor worry about what happens to us when we die, for science teaches us that death is the extinction of consciousness and that the gods do not concern themselves with human destiny.

In his view that *anxiety* is the cause of most of our troubles, Epicurus sounds strikingly modern. To overcome anxiety, he believed, education is necessary. Hence it is the task of philosophy to counteract the ills of the mind and to give us a sense of intellectual stability. Such stability, Epicurus maintained, cannot be found in an active social life. The wise man thus will not take part in political affairs; he will not try to reform the existing governments. Rather, he will cultivate his own capacities and cherish his own happiness.

To achieve this painless existence Epicurus advocated, above all, friendship. Marriage, he thought, involves too many tempests, too many storms, and too many uncertainties; it creates ties and leads to emotional serfdom. Friendship, on the other hand, being less possessive and less intimate, in his opinion leads to true tranquillity. Evidently Epicurus followed his own precepts for the good life, for he never married.

His discussion of the various virtues is extremely realistic. He did not idealize justice; rather, he found its source in *expediency*. The state, he held, is the result of a compact between subjects and rulers whereby both profit. Right and wrong are determined by laws, not by ideal standards, as Plato had imagined. We cannot speak, accordingly, of an ideal utopia or of ideal beauty or ideal justice or ideal truth. Rather, in evaluating moral acts we must look at the consequences.

Why does the wise man obey the laws? Why does he subordinate himself to political authority? The Epicureans believed that he does so because of self-interest, for he will then have more intellectual tranquillity. He will sleep well at night, while those who evade the laws and commit acts of injustice will suffer in fear of being detected.

It is true that this is not an idealistic view when measured by Platonic standards, but, it must be remembered, the Epicureans were interested in describing society as they saw it, not in picturing ideal standards. Like the Sophists, they noted that there are no absolute

institutions—all are relative. They applied this concept to international law, in which field they showed that various types of justice prevail. For example, there is one type of justice which prevails between equally strong nations and another type of justice which exists between a strong and a weak nation. This theory almost anticipates Hobbes, who likewise stressed *realism* in international politics.

The climax of the moral system of Epicurus is his belief that the most important pleasures are those of the mind. The mind has the power of reflection and can contemplate life as a whole. It can reflect upon the pleasant occurrences of the past as well as the happy things which it may expect in the future. Furthermore, it can triumph over bodily infirmity. Even when sick and plagued by disease, we can have a cheerful perspective on life through mental concentration.

At the same time, Epicurus taught, the mind can suffer more intense pains than can the body. Modern psychology with its concept of neuroses and psychoses verifies his viewpoint. We must cultivate the resources of our mind so that we may not suffer from pain but lead a tranquil existence.

Life, it may be said in objection, often presents us with situations in which the pleasure element is not dominant. Imagine that we are suffering from cancer and are in great pain. Can we still accept Epicurean standards? Epicurus would answer in the affirmative, for pain, he felt, cannot last very long and, at any rate, acute suffering persists for only a short period. We can always endure it by the thought of the happiness which is still obtainable. To revert to our case of cancer, even under the suffering it imposes we can use our intellectual resources. And if the pain lasts very long, we will be released by death, which should not be dreaded but regarded as a natural event.

The teaching of Epicurus may appear rather impractical, yet he lived up to his own ideals. Throughout his life he disregarded his frail condition and never let pain conquer him. It takes a vast amount of endurance and strength to cherish such a philosophy, and certainly Epicurus possessed these virtues.

Epicurus spoke about the ideal man, who follows these teachings. Such a man understands the nature of the universe: "He has diligently considered the end fixed by nature, and understands how easily the limit of good things can be reached and attained, and how either the duration or the intensity of evils is but slight. Destiny, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, he laughs to scorn, affirming rather that some things happen of necessity, others

by chance, others through our own agency. For he sees that necessity destroys responsibility and that chance or fortune is inconstant; whereas our own actions are free, and it is to them that praise and blame naturally attach. It were better, indeed, to accept the legends of the gods than to bow beneath that yoke of destiny which the natural philosophers have imposed. The one holds out some faint hope that we may escape if we honor the gods, while the necessity of the naturalists is deaf to all entreaties. Nor does he hold chance to be a god, as the world in general does, for in the acts of a god there is no disorder. . . . He believes that the misfortune of the wise is better than the prosperity of the fool."<sup>13</sup>

Such a way of life is not out of our reach. Although occasionally we may be overcome by certain pains, we can still attain a tranquil existence. This is a philosophy not just for the professional thinker but for the multitude. It is not a utopia for the future but a theory which can be followed in the present.

Thus it can be understood why the Epicureans were so vigorous in their beliefs and why they had a strong sense of mission. They wanted to lighten the burden of humanity, to remove the evils of supernaturalism and blind faith, and instead preach a way of life leading to true peace of mind.

### LUCRETIVS

We know almost nothing about the life of Lucretius (c. 98–55 B.C.), who gave the most poetic expression to Epicureanism. We are told that he suffered from periodic fits of insanity and finally committed suicide. Still, he cherished the ideal of reason which Epicurus regarded as the main source of happiness.

The period in which Lucretius lived was extremely stormy. The civil war between Marius and Sulla, Spartacus' insurrection, and the rise to power of Julius Caesar—all these events showed how completely unstable the political life was. Fortune could not be relied upon. This fact explains why Lucretius sought refuge in a philosophy of tranquillity and serenity.

The thoughts of Lucretius are expressed in the *De rerum natura*, which almost rivals the *Divine comedy* in philosophic insight and imaginativeness. But Lucretius, unlike Dante, took science as his guide and had no patience with the explanations of religion. Even in the first book of the poem he tells us about the many misdeeds of religion. He resurrected the account of Iphigenia, who, according to

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 133–135.

tradition, was sacrificed by her father to placate the gods so that the Greeks would have favorable winds in their war against the Trojans:

"This terror, this darkness of mind, is dispersed  
by no radiant sunrise,  
Or by the bright shafts of day, but only by  
Nature's revealing  
A knowledge of her own law, which this first  
principle teaches:  
That nothing from nothing is born, even by  
power divine.  
Mankind is held in dominion by fear but for  
this one reason:  
That seeing on land and in sky so much of whose  
cause they are witness  
Men think the divinities there are at work.  
But when we are certain  
That naught is created from naught, what we  
seek we divine more clearly:  
Both the source from which things can be made  
and the way in which all is accomplished  
Without divine intervention. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Lucretius preached the joy of contemplation. He realized how futile most men's lives are.

"It is pleasant when over the ocean winds are  
troubling the waters,  
To gaze from the shore at another's laboring  
tribulation,  
Not because any man's troubles are cause for  
your joyous delight,  
But because it is sweet to perceive what evils  
yourself have been spared.  
Pleasant also it is to behold the great encounters  
of warfare  
Arrayed on a distant plain, with nothing of  
yours in peril.  
But there can be nothing more goodly than  
holding serene, high plateaus,

<sup>14</sup> *De rerum natura*, Bk. 1. From Robbins and Coleman, ed., *Western world literature*. Copyright 1938 by The Macmillan Company and used with their permission.



Well fortified by the teachings of the wise, from  
which you may look  
Down from your height upon others and see  
them wandering astray  
In their lonely search for the pathway of life,  
co-rivals in genius  
Fighting for precedence, working, day and night,  
with surpassing toil  
To mount the summits of power and the mastery  
of the world."<sup>15</sup>

Lucretius held that design does not explain anything. To some extent he anticipated Darwin in his theory of evolution, which tried to give a naturalistic account of life. There is no essential difference, he held, between the higher and the lower parts of nature. Man evolves slowly and is subject to the laws of nature. His actions cannot be explained according to metaphysical principles.

In his moral system Lucretius warned us against materialism. We are not to trust externals, for our salvation does not lie in the possession of wealth or honor. We must strive for peace of mind rather than an accumulation of worldly goods.

In Lucretius, furthermore, we find a systematized philosophy of civilization. He did not idealize primitive life. It is true that men were stronger in ancient days, he wrote, but they lived a crude and unsatisfactory existence and were exposed to all kinds of terrors which have been removed through science and civilization. Lucretius, following Epicurus, showed how technology advances civilization. Most important to him were the discovery of fire, the building of huts, and the domestication of animals. Inventions which aid in our control of nature are always due to man himself, he claimed, not to the intervention of the gods. Yet, civilization is hindered by two great evils, one is *religion*, the other the *love for money*. Both must be conquered if man is to live a meaningful and painless life.

Lucretius reminds us somewhat of Spencer in his theory that the universe obeys a cycle—that it grows and decays. This theory does not imply, however, that death is to be dreaded, for it comes as a gentle liberator.

"The man to whom pain is decreed hereafter, must  
live when it comes;

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. II.

But death, by withholding life from him for  
 whom pain might occur,  
 All pain precludes. So we know that naught's to  
 be dreaded in death;  
 There can no wretchedness come to one who  
 no longer exists,  
 Any more than if he'd not been born, when death  
 claims his mortal life. . . ."<sup>16</sup>

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EPICUREANISM

In Epicureanism we find one of the perennial philosophies of life. It is a theory which does not depend on national or religious barriers. Thus we find Epicureanism in a Catholic like Gassendi, in a pantheist like Whitman, and in a mathematician like Bertrand Russell. In some ways the spirit of Lucretius in his great poem reminds us of Russell's *A free man's worship*.

It may be asked why this philosophy is so attractive and why it has such a constant appeal. In the first place, it is based on individualism. Its starting point is not society but the individual. It is an acknowledged fact that most artists and thinkers are introspective, interested primarily in their own emotions, sensations, and needs rather than in the salvation of society. Thus, frequently they are attracted by Epicureanism.

In the second place, it is a philosophy which gives us hope in times of chaos and anarchy. While empires may collapse and wars ravish the earth, we can still cultivate our own garden and find peace of mind.

In the third place, Epicureanism is a scientific philosophy, and to many modern thinkers science appears as an absolute Good and as the only hope for man's survival. To accept science presupposes a process of intellectual and emotional reconstruction such as Epicurus had made in his period. Such a reconstruction shatters many of our fond biases and illusions, but it makes us truly emancipated.

Yet, in spite of all its advantages, there is a note of sadness in Epicureanism, just as there is a strain of melancholy in Lucretius. For it is difficult to live according to the resources of science. It is painful to get away from our childhood myths. It is disillusioning to think of the universe as being unconcerned with man's desires and ideals. Furthermore, the ideal life of the Epicurean, which is dedicated to a painless existence, appears to be rather inert and static.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

It contains a note of futility and negation—almost an approximation of the Buddhist Nirvana. It is not surprising that many moralists have rebelled against this standard and have emphasized, instead, a more active and dynamic approach to the problems of existence.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What influences were mainly responsible for Epicureanism?
2. What is the function of philosophy, according to Epicurus?
3. How did Epicurus view scientific determinism?
4. Describe the cosmological doctrines of Epicurus.
5. How did Epicurus describe the gods?
6. What did Epicurus say about death?
7. How did Epicurus live up to his teachings?
8. What was Epicurus' attitude toward marriage and friendship?
9. What contributions did Lucretius make to philosophy?
10. Why is Epicureanism so attractive to the 20th century?

## THE MEANING OF STOICISM

. . . . .

### ORIGINS

**S**toicism, like Epicureanism, rose from the impact of previous philosophies. Especially important in its development was the theory of Heraclitus, who, it will be remembered, taught that everything in nature is in a state of flux but that this process is controlled by the universal reason, the *logos*. The Stoics gave a more metaphysical meaning to the logos doctrine and thus paved the way for its acceptance in Christian theology.

As we also remember, Heraclitus identified the universal substance with fire. This doctrine was adopted by the Stoics, who regarded *fire as the primary substance* and looked upon its changes as symbols of the variety of the world process. Furthermore, as we have noted, Heraclitus had a very high concept of the function of philosophy. Consequently he looked down on the masses, who were dominated by vain passions and superficial ideals. The same spirit reappears in early Stoic philosophy, which made a sharp distinction between the thinker and the multitude and which believed there could be no compromise between wisdom and popular opinions.

Significant, also, in the development of Stoicism were the teachings of Socrates; in fact, Socrates became one of the saints of Stoi-

cism. His self-control, his resignation to death, his emphasis on virtue, his moderate way of life, his faith in Providence, his belief in guidance by an inner voice—all these things were appreciated by the Stoic philosophers. To them the life of Socrates indicated that moral heroism is possible and that man can never be conquered by the force of external circumstances.

Even more immediate than the influence of Socrates was the influence of the Cynics. The latter reacted strongly against the pleasure theory. They were professional teachers of virtue and believed in moral asceticism. They were spectacular in their teachings and had no use for conventional social ideals. It would be a mistake, however, to regard the Stoics merely as imitators of the Cynic way of life, for they had more extensive scientific interests and, at least in later times, developed more positive and constructive social ideals. In a sense Stoicism was a cosmopolitan and urbane form of Cynicism.

Besides the Cynics we must mention the Megarics. They had a profound impact on the development of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. From the Megarics the Stoics absorbed the spirit of monism. The Megarics asserted that evil has no metaphysical reality, and their standpoint reappears in the Stoic theory. Furthermore, the Stoics absorbed from the Megarics a preoccupation with logical subtleties, which were especially stressed by Chrysippus.

We must not neglect the influence of Plato on Stoicism, for he had stressed the importance of morality and thought virtues not relative but absolute. To act merely according to the dictates of expediency was regarded as inadequate by Plato, and the same spirit appears in Stoicism. Moreover, Plato's concept of the Good can easily be identified with the Stoic ideal of world reason. However, there is a profound difference between the philosophy of Plato and that of the Stoics. Plato's system was *dualistic*, while the Stoics accepted a *monistic* interpretation of reality.

The Stoics also owed a great deal to Aristotle. From him they borrowed the foundation of their cosmology. Like Aristotle, they believed the earth to be the center of the universe and regarded the heliocentric theory as both invalid scientifically and impious in a religious sense. Like Aristotle, they refused to accept the Democritean picture of the universe. They emphasized the fact that qualitative changes cannot be reduced to quantitative laws. Again following Aristotle, they spoke of two kinds of motion—one rectilinear, which governs the phenomena of the earth; and the other circular, which prevails in the movements of the heavens.

However, the Stoics did not believe in Aristotle's concept of the four causes; instead, they spoke only of *one* cause. They also rejected his view that a fifth element, ether, exists.

In spite of these rejections of certain parts of Aristotle, the spirit of Aristotelian science is evident in Stoic reflections, for the Stoics refused to adopt a mechanistic interpretation of the universe; to them the concept of *design* was fundamental. Like Aristotle, they could not accept a naturalistic concept of evolution, and thus they regarded man as distinct from the animal world and as the lord of creation.

### THE IDEAL OF PHILOSOPHY

The Stoics had a sublime concept of the function of the philosopher. They believed a thinker must exemplify his principles in action. It is not what he teaches that matters so much as his *way of life*. To be hypocritical and insincere was regarded as unworthy of a philosopher, who should be firmly convinced of the validity and strength of his arguments.

The life of the philosopher, according to the Stoics, is to be dedicated to the search for virtue. He should surpass his contemporaries in moral earnestness and moral discipline. He is to live on a spiritual mountain from which he surveys the actions of his fellow citizens. In short, the philosopher must be imbued with a sense of vocation. Thus he should not aim for public applause or for fame or for worldly honors. He should regard his profession with deep earnestness. In a sense, Stoicism regarded philosophy as a surgery of the soul.

Unlike the Cynics, the Stoic teachers did not neglect their personal appearance. This attention to appearance does not imply that they were fashionable or luxurious in dress. On the contrary, they generally were simple men who lived in a frugal manner and shunned the luxuries of life. While the Cynics often went to extremes in their disregard for convention, most of the Stoics avoided this tendency and were careful not to repel their listeners by slovenly dress.

### OLD STOICISM

The first period of Stoicism starts with the philosophy of Zeno. He was born *c.* 331 B.C. in Citium, a Greek settlement on the island of Cyprus. In his ancestry there were Semitic strains, which perhaps explain his preoccupation with morality. He studied in Athens un-

der a variety of teachers and was influenced, in turn, by Cynic, Megaric, and Platonic doctrines. About 294 B.C. Zeno opened his own school of philosophy in the painted porch, the *Stoa Poikile*, in the market place of Athens. Thus we have the derivation of the term *Stoics*—men of the porch.

Throughout his lifetime Zeno was highly honored. Kings and princes visited him, and the Athenians regarded him as one of the notable thinkers of the city. In his old age he suffered from a physical infirmity and chose suicide as the most satisfactory exit from life.

In his early period Zeno wrote a utopia, the *Republic*, which indicates his cosmopolitan views. As the foundation for his ideal state he chose the world, not the city-state. He was far less religious than Plato; thus, he had no use for temples and sacrifices. Incidentally, he did not believe in class distinctions. All men of his republic were to share the political functions, and all would co-operate for the welfare of the state. Being idealistic, he advocated that this state have no law courts, for co-operation was to reign supreme among the citizens. No one would find it necessary to prosecute another, because all would be guided by justice. His state, in short, would be guided by the dictates of love and compassion.

In his metaphysical doctrines Zeno believed in pantheism and that god and the universe are not distinct. God is material, he claimed, although his body is much purer than any other substance. The universe is guided by the logos, which gives form and meaning to the world process. It is the task of man to order his life according to universal reason and to exemplify the ideal of consistency which nature follows.

Unlike Plato, Zeno did not believe there is opposition between the soul and the body. He thought that the soul is material; but this line of reasoning did not lead him to the standpoint of materialism, for he asserted that the soul is guided by reason, which is a part of the world-substance.

Reacting against the Epicurean philosophy, Zeno attacked the pleasure principle. Regarding virtue as the supreme Good, he contended that man could best find himself by emancipation from dependence on external objects. How do we know what virtues to accept? How can we understand the good life? This knowledge, Zeno answered, is best acquired by following the rules of reason, for we cannot find lasting satisfaction in transitory things but only in moral independence.

## CLEANTHES

Zeno had many followers, among them Aristo, Persaeus, and Herillus; but his most important student was Cleanthes, who absorbed not only his doctrines but also his way of life. According to tradition, Cleanthes was a pugilist and so poor that he had to toil hard to make a living. Certainly he was not distinguished by intellectual depth. He was, however, a man of deep religious conviction.

In Cleanthes we find almost a missionary fervor. He regarded Stoicism as a religion and stressed God's providence and concern for man. We can honor God, he thought, through prayer and through following his dictates.

Cleanthes' religious ideals are best expressed in his *Hymn to Zeus*:

"Chiefest glory of deathless Gods, Almighty for ever,  
Sovereign of Nature that rulest by law, what Name shall we  
give Thee?—

Blessed be Thou! for on Thee should call all things that are  
mortal.

For that we are Thine offspring; nay, all that in myriad motion  
Lives for its day on the earth bears one impress—Thy likeness  
—upon it.

Wherefore my song is of Thee, and I hymn Thy power for  
ever.

"Lo, the vast orb of the Worlds, round the Earth evermore as  
it rolleth,

Feels Thee its ruler and Guide, and owns Thy lordship rejoic-  
ing.

Aye, for Thy conquering hands have a servant of living fire—  
Sharp is the bolt!—where it falls, Nature shrinks at the shock  
and doth shudder.

Thus Thou directest the Word universal that pulses through  
all things,

Mingling its life with Lights that are great and Lights that are  
lesser,

E'en as becometh its birth, High King through ages unending.

"Nought is done that is done without Thee in the earth or the  
waters

Or in the heights of heaven, save the deed of the fool and the  
sinner.



Thou canst make rough things smooth; at Thy Voice, lo, jarring disorder  
 Moveth to music, and Love is born where hatred abounded.  
 ..."<sup>1</sup>

The religious fervor of Cleanthes reminds us of the psalms and of Ikhnaton's *Hymn to the sun*. To disbelieve in God he regarded as a serious crime; and with vigor he wrote against the heliocentric theory, which he regarded as an affront to God's providence.

### CHRYSIPPUS

While Cleanthes was primarily interested in religion, Chrysippus was more interested in dialectic. He was head of the Stoic school from 232 to 206 B.C., and during this period he wrote a multitude of works. Most of them were rather unoriginal, but he strengthened the Stoic doctrines by giving to them a definite form and logical consistency. He was especially concerned in refuting the attacks of the Skeptics, who maintained that definite knowledge cannot be found. In this process he modified some of his teachings, although he never accepted the doctrine of probability.

Chrysippus was followed by lesser lights, such as Diogenes of Seleucia, Zeno of Tarsus, and Antipater. The last-named indicated the weakening of the austerity of early Stoicism in his belief that external goods are not to be despised, since they contribute to the perfection of virtue.

### THE MIDDLE STOA

The second period of Stoicism, which lasted for about two hundred years (200 B.C.—1 A.D.), was marked by the spread of Stoicism to Rome and other parts of the civilized world. The climactic event of this period was the embassy which Athens sent to Rome in 155 B.C. The Stoics were represented by Diogenes of Seleucia, who impressed his listeners by his self-restraint and his emphasis on temperance.

The most important thinker in this period was probably Panaetius of Rhodes, who studied at Pergamum and at Athens and who greatly admired Plato and Aristotle. In fact, he modified the early Stoic doctrines by introducing important elements of Aristotelian and Platonic teachings.

<sup>1</sup> Stobaeus, *Eclogae physicae et ethicae*, i, 2, 12, Webster, *Historical selections*, pp. 287–288.

Panaetius later visited Rome, where he became acquainted with prominent statesmen and spread the concepts of Greek philosophy. Later he became head of the Stoic school at Athens, where he exerted wide influence.

In his social doctrines Panaetius was rather urbane. He believed that the Stoic philosophy could not only train the scholar but help the statesman, the scientist, and the artist. He was more conscious of the advantage of external goods than was Zeno, and he thought they might be acquired provided they did not clash with the dictates of virtue. He spoke much about the performance of daily tasks through which the Stoic might exercise the duties of citizenship. Thus he appealed not merely to those who had found perfection but, above all, to those who were slowly trying to remould their lives and find virtue.

In his metaphysical theory Panaetius accepted Aristotle's doctrine that the universe is eternal. Holding grave doubts regarding divination, he rejected the belief that the universe can be destroyed through a conflagration. In every way he was different from Cleantes since he represents a rather *secular* outlook on life.

Panaetius avoided extremes in his ethical ideals. He considered soberness especially important. Being influenced by the Roman way of life, he upheld decorum and dignity. Again the influence of Aristotle is evident in his view that virtue is the mean between two vices. In a word, moderation and balance characterize his moral speculations.

Posidonius of Rhodes was a student of Panaetius but far more religious than the latter. He was very much influenced by Plato and, like him, believed the soul divine in origin and immortal. The body, he taught, is a jail for the soul; hence, we detect dualistic strains in his system. He was less scientific than Panaetius and accepted divination, which he regarded as an essential part of religion. He was certain that the universe is governed by the providence of God and consequently made much of the *logos* doctrine.

In ethics Posidonius taught that virtue is an end in itself and external goods are to be disregarded. In every way he represented a more conservative spirit than his teacher, who had a naturalistic bias.

Hecato of Rhodes was more inclined to agree with Panaetius than with Posidonius. He did not neglect the social duties; and no man, he said, can live well without ordering his life in such a way as to perform the functions of citizenship and of family life. The wise

man should not abandon his property, Hecato declared, but be conscious of the duties he owes society as a man and as a citizen.

### ROMAN STOICISM

The last period of Stoicism was approximately from 1 A.D. to 200 A.D. Its center was Rome, and it saw the flourishing of the moral systems of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, whom we shall discuss later. Other noteworthy representatives were Cornutus (*c.* 20–66 A.D.) and Musonius Rufus, who was one of Rome's outstanding teachers.

Cornutus is known mainly for his treatise dealing with the nature of the gods, in which he tried to rationalize the popular mythology. He gave an allegorical explanation of the gods. For example, he thought Zeus was the soul of the universe and identified Prometheus with the Providence which governs all things. Hera, the wife of Zeus, he identified with air. This identification Cornutus regarded as very appropriate, since he taught that air and fire are closely associated.

Musonius Rufus was concerned with bringing about a moral reformation in Rome. He dwelt especially upon the importance of marriage. If the family were destroyed, he believed, the Roman state could not last. To him the family was the most essential institution. He believed that marriage could well be combined with philosophy and that philosophers should be model husbands—a view which is somewhat difficult to prove in practice.

Especially admired in later times was Euphrates, who was noted for his impressive teachings and personal charm. He followed the precepts of Musonius Rufus and had a family of three children, to whom he was completely devoted. He did not demand much of his students in the way of moral asceticism, and he thought worldly success could be combined with Stoic detachment.

More strict and exacting than Euphrates was Dio of Prusa (*c.* 40–120 A.D.). He regarded himself as a missionary whose task was to save the souls of the wicked. He specialized in speeches addressed to the multitude and thereby brought philosophy down to earth. Having contempt for all the luxuries of life, he was satisfied to wear a shabby cloak. He impressed all with the sincerity of his teachings and the eloquence of his speech.

Another noteworthy Stoic was Rusticus, one of the teachers of Marcus Aurelius, who testified to his effectiveness. Rusticus concentrated on simplicity of speech and believed moral teachings to

be all-important. He had little use for rhetoric, poetry, and science. He maintained that the primary task of the thinker is to be an example in his way of life, shunning all triviality and superficiality in thought and conduct.

What are the distinguishing features of this last period of Stoicism? First of all, Stoicism had become more practical and now was more closely in touch with the demands of daily life. The austerity of the early teachings was modified. There was not so sharp a difference between the wise man and the multitude, between virtue and wickedness. It taught that moral perfection cannot be achieved all at once but can best be obtained through gradual learning and increasing practice.

More stress was placed on external things, such as property and the duties and privileges of citizenship. To be sure, these things were not regarded as absolute Goods, but the Roman Stoics felt that they could not be neglected.

Furthermore, Stoicism was universalized. The concept of the natural law which gives certain rights to all people was elaborated. In this way the Stoics paved the way for the internationalism which we find in the Medieval Church.

It must not be forgotten that the Roman Stoics were concerned primarily with the problem of *morality*. They were less interested in physics, a subject which was highly regarded by the early Stoics. The Roman philosophers used moral principles as a weapon against the degradation of society. They regarded their philosophy as an expression of universal equality. Thus there was no room in their system for class distinctions. Their philosophy could be taught with equal effectiveness by a slave, such as Epictetus, or by an emperor, such as Marcus Aurelius.

### THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

To appreciate the philosophy of Stoicism it is necessary to understand the Stoics' concept of philosophy. Like the Epicureans, they believed ethics to be primary; but they did not neglect scientific speculations. To them, philosophy served both to unify the physical sciences and to point out the essential problems of metaphysics. Consequently, they dealt with such metaphysical problems as the nature of the soul and the character of God. Philosophy and science, they believed, are not opposed to each other, for science uses primarily the analytic technique whereas philosophy uses the method of synthesis.

The Stoics generally divided philosophy into three fields: first, logic, which they regarded as the science of reasoning; second, physics, which also included the study of ontology—that is, God, the soul, and the universe; and third, ethics, the theory of the good life. To them ethics was not an abstract study; rather, it was eminently functional. They believed that ethical ideals can be applied to daily life and that such ideals can completely change man's outlook and character.

In their theory of knowledge, the Stoics asserted that our mind at birth is a blank tablet. We acquire knowledge through the senses. Thus the starting point of the Stoics is empirical: We receive impressions both objectively through external stimuli and subjectively through our own inner feelings.

In their epistemology, the Stoics were opposed to Platonic realism. Only the *individual* is real, they asserted, and the world does not contain real universals, for we only perceive *specific* things. How then do we arrive at general concepts? How can we establish the laws of science and morality? The Stoics explained that the mind unites certain images, hence trains of thought arise. Thus we can explain certain universal ideas which are common to all mankind.

It can be seen that although the mind is a blank tablet at birth, it is not inert. The mind is dynamic and active, the Stoics averred, and it synthesizes the impressions which it receives from the outside. It uses the impressions as a foundation for general concepts which are found not merely in the field of science but also in morality and religion. Truths common to mankind, the Stoics held, include our faith in God and the universality of virtue.

The problem of the origin of error inevitably suggests itself. Error arises in two ways, according to the Stoics. First, subjectively, when we are not clear as to the nature of our sensations. Second, objectively, when we draw a false inference regarding an external perception. Error is connected with our will. When we receive a certain image of the external world, our will interprets it. It is important in this process not to jump to hasty conclusions, the Stoics taught, for assent is not to be given spontaneously but only after due reflection.

The Stoics were opposed to the doctrines of Skepticism, which they regarded as self-defeating. They believed that if Skepticism became common, no consistent philosophy could arise and in the long run it would paralyze all moral action.

The Stoics were also concerned with the standard of truth. They noted that some representations are hazy, confused, and vague while others are distinguished by clarity and distinctness and give a valid idea of the objects for which they stand. This makes them *irresistible* and brings to the percipient the conviction that they are true. This doctrine of the *irresistibility* of certain concepts was attacked by the Skeptics, who believed only in *probability* as the criterion of knowledge.

To appreciate the Stoic doctrine of knowledge, we must understand the Stoic concept of the soul: The soul is a replica of the universe. It is composed of a ruling part, the five senses, and the powers of speech and procreation. The ruling part of the soul resembles God; it symbolizes the influence of the divine within us. Some Stoics called it the king and the lawgiver.

The Stoics made no clear distinction between reason and will. In this point again they showed their profound difference from Platonic philosophers. The ruling part of man, they felt, includes both reason and assent. Our reason not merely has a speculative function but is also a prelude to *action*. The will is especially significant, for through it we can obtain true autonomy and true independence. To some extent the Stoics foreshadowed the Kantian philosophy, which likewise emphasized the importance of the good will and concerned itself with motives, not consequences.

The soul, the Stoics held, is a representation of the universe; it is essentially *material*. In its substance it is fiery and thus is identical with the creative fire which is the basis of the world process. Still, the soul may have other elements, such as air. In this way we can account for the variety in human traits. For example, according to the Stoics, those men who are dull and lethargic may have an abundance of earth and water in their constitutions. On the other hand, those who tend to be extremely passionate have an excess of fire.

Regarding immortality the Stoics had a variety of doctrines. They all agreed that although the individual soul cannot survive the world conflagration, its substance cannot be destroyed. Thus Chrysippus believed the souls of the good survive until the conflagration. Those who have lived irrational and wicked lives, on the other hand, perish when their bodies die.

The process of sensation is explained in a rather elementary way by the Stoics. They held that from the object there proceed influences which influence the sense organs. At the same time the mind

sends out certain waves. When the two meet an imprint results and knowledge is produced. To make knowledge possible, a medium is needed for the waves. This medium the Stoics found in air.

At first the Stoics did not elaborate their concept of sensation. They took many of their principles for granted, but the attacks of the Skeptics forced them to state their position more clearly. Consequently, they distinguished between a single sensation, such as taste or sight or smell, and a mind picture which contains several sensations. When the mind picture is presented to us, said the Stoics, we can either give our assent that it is true or we can declare it to be false. When we give our assent too hastily, error results. To be certain that correct knowledge results, the Stoics advocated a mastering of the object and, in cases of doubt, suspension of judgment.

The great accomplishment of man, according to the Stoics, is his capacity for reason. We can develop this faculty through the study of philosophy and careful intellectual discipline. Animals, on the other hand, do not possess this capacity and are guided by their sensations. To live well, then, we must cultivate our rational capacities, for through them we understand the nature of the universe and are able to know the meaning of life.

### COSMOLOGY IN STOICISM

The Stoic cosmology is the center of the Stoic system. It is strikingly different from that of the Epicureans. The latter believed in a mechanistic arrangement of nature, in which scientific laws dominate everything. The Stoics, however, started with the *logos*, the world reason, according to which the universe is fashioned. In other words, *teleology* governs the Stoic system. Nature is the source of Providence. Its laws, the *logoi spermatikoi*, are individual expressions of the *logos spermatikos*, the divine reason. Notice how this view differs from that of the Epicureans, who regarded nature as imperfect and denied the providence of God.

Another fundamental Stoic concept is that of world conflagration. This is based on the theory that in the universe there are both an upward and a downward way. We must imagine earth as the lowest of the substances; above it we find water, then air, and finally fire. One element turns into another by a gradual process. Thus, earth turns into water, then into air, and finally into fire. At last the universe will be full of heat. Hence the Stoics spoke of a period in which rivers will be dry, earthquakes will take place, stars will collide, and all living things will *die*. This theory does not imply,

however, that life will be forever extinguished, for the conflagration will be succeeded by reconstruction. While particular worlds will perish, the universe as an eternal substance will remain the same. It must be remembered, however, that the theory of world conflagration was not accepted by all of the Stoics. Panaetius inclined to the Aristotelian view that the universe is eternal.

The fundamental substance of the universe, according to the Stoics, is material. But we must not make the mistake of regarding it as passive and inert, according to the 18th-century viewpoint; rather, it is a dynamic and active principle. It has the power of movement and contains within itself the capacity for rarefaction and condensation.

Time and space, the Stoics held, do not exist separately but are closely connected as functions of matter. For example, we do not know time except for the movement of matter. Since matter is limited, the Stoics spoke of finite space. Here again their views clashed with those of the Epicureans, who taught that space is *infinite*.

It is important to notice the place of force in the Stoic world-picture. Force they regarded as the soul of nature, while matter they considered its body. In every way nature is alive and contains the seeds of development, they declared.

As for the nature of God, the Stoics were not consistent in their views. They described him occasionally as fire or, again, as air. They spoke of him in theistic and pantheistic terms and identified him with world-reason, with providence, and with nature. In short, they used both spiritual and material terms to describe him. They were definite on one thing, however: God lives not far away and is not unconcerned with human beings; his providence rules the world.

Let us visualize the Stoic universe. It is spherical in shape; it is divided into two parts: the earth, surrounded by water; and the sky, revolving around the earth. The Stoics explained that earth and water naturally turn downward while air and fire naturally turn upward. Fire, of all the elements, is the most primary. As the source of life it can be identified with motion, and it characterizes the nature of divinity.

The Stoics followed popular belief in accepting the theory that the stars are divine. They sharply attacked the Epicurean view, which tried to give a naturalistic explanation of the stars. They were especially concerned with the classification of the sun, which Cleanthes regarded as the ruling element in the universe. Compared



with the Epicurean world-view, the Stoic picture seems more primitive and more susceptible to the influence of popular theology.

To sum up the Stoic picture of the universe we find the following aspects:

- (1) Stoicism is a teleological philosophy; thus it rejects the mechanistic view of the Epicureans.
- (2) It is geocentric. Indeed, many Stoics regarded the heliocentric hypothesis as impious.
- (3) It is pantheistic, God being regarded as the soul of the universe and the universe as the body of God.
- (4) It is materialistic; body is the ultimate substance. (But we must think of the Stoic doctrine as a *dynamic* form of materialism.)
- (5) Nature is governed by world-reason, or the *logos*. This point of view implies that nature is perfect.
- (6) The Stoics taught the doctrine of world conflagration. No world, then, is eternal; but the universe itself does not perish.
- (7) Just as laws govern nature, so reason rules man's life. Reason, then, has not merely a psychological significance—it has also a metaphysical status, for it characterizes the nature of deity.

### THE STOIC SYSTEM OF ETHICS

In passing to the ethical system of the Stoics, we find that they objected strenuously to the Epicurean concept of pleasure. Instead of hedonism they emphasized virtue guided by reason.

Diogenes Laertius tells us, "As for the assertion made by some people that pleasure is the object to which the first impulse of animals is directed, it is shown by the Stoics to be false. For pleasure, if it is really felt, they declare to be a by-product, which never comes until nature by itself has sought and found the means suitable to the animal's existence or constitution; it is an aftermath comparable to the condition of animals thriving and plants in full bloom. And nature, they say, made no difference originally between plants and animals, for she regulates the life of plants, too, in their case without impulse and sensation, just as also certain processes go on of a vegetative kind in us. But when in the case of animals, impulse has been superadded, whereby they are enabled to go in quest of their proper aliment, for them, say the Stoics, Nature's rule is to follow the direction of impulse. But when reason by way of a more perfect leadership has been bestowed on the beings we call rational,

for them life according to reason rightly becomes the natural life. For reason supervenes to shape impulse scientifically.”<sup>2</sup>

The goal of life, according to the Stoics, is to live in conformity with nature:

“By the nature with which our life ought to be in accord, Chrysippus understands both universal nature and more particularly the nature of man, whereas Cleanthes takes the nature of the universe alone as that which should be followed, without adding the nature of the individual.

“And virtue, he holds, is a harmonious disposition, choice-worthy for its own sake and not from hope or fear or any external motive. Moreover, it is in virtue that happiness consists; for virtue is the state of mind which tends to make the whole of life harmonious. When a rational being is perverted, this is due to the deceptiveness of external pursuits or sometimes to the influence of associates. For the starting points of nature are never perverse.”<sup>3</sup>

The Stoics placed moral virtues foremost among the goals of the good life. Among these virtues we find wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance:

“Particular virtues are magnanimity, continence, endurance, presence of mind, good counsel. And wisdom they define as the knowledge of things good and evil and of what is neither good nor evil; courage as knowledge of what we ought to choose, what we ought to beware of, and what is indifferent . . . magnanimity as the knowledge or habit of mind which makes one superior to anything that happens, whether good or evil equally; continence as a disposition never overcome in that which concerns right reason, or a habit which no pleasures can get the better of; endurance as a knowledge or habit which suggests what we are to hold fast to, what not, and what is indifferent . . . good counsel as knowledge by which we see what to do and how to do it if we would consult our own interests.

“Similarly, of vices, some are primary, others subordinate: *e.g.*, folly, cowardice, injustice, profligacy are accounted primary; but incontinence, stupidity, ill-advisedness subordinate. Further, they hold that the vices are forms of ignorance of those things whereof the corresponding virtues are the knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of eminent philosophers*, II, Bk. VII, Hicks' translation (Loeb classical library series), 85-86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-94.

It is interesting to note the Stoics' concept of sin. They urged that four things be shunned: first, fear; second, greed; third, grief; fourth, excitement. They taught that if we fear the various ordeals of life, we are being conquered by external circumstances. Thus we should never regard poverty or sickness as absolute evils, for we should learn how to endure them courageously. The Stoics were emphatic in declaring all forms of greed evil. Excessive love for money, they showed, does not bring happiness or virtue, but only undermines the health of our souls.

We must beware of anger, they taught. When we face a danger, we should not be moved by emotions; rather, we should be guided by an invariable sense of duty. We should not be angry with those who wish to harm us, for usually they are merely motivated by ignorance. But, it might be objected, we cannot fight successfully if our passions are not first aroused. Is not anger a healthy emotion? The Stoics answered in the negative. We fight better, they believed, when we are detached and truly objective. Incidentally, they asserted that the brave man is usually completely cool. The good boxer is one who is scientific and not overwhelmed by passion but in complete control of himself.

Wise men are guided by the ideal of goodness: "At the same time they are free from pretense; for they have stripped off all pretense or 'make-up' whether in voice or in look. Free too are they from all business cares, declining to do anything which conflicts with duty. They will take wine, but not get drunk. Nay more, they will not be liable to madness either; not but what there will at times occur to the good man strange impressions due to melancholy or delirium, ideas not determined by the principle of what is choice-worthy but contrary to nature. Nor indeed will the wise man ever feel grief; seeing that grief is irrational contraction of the soul. . . .

"They are also, it is declared, godlike; for they have a something divine within them; whereas the bad man is godless. And yet of this word—godless or ungodly—there are two senses, one in which it is the opposite of the term 'godly,' the other denoting the man who ignores the divine altogether: in this latter sense, as they note, the term does not apply to every bad man. The good, it is added, are also worshipers of God; for they have acquaintance with the rites of the gods, and piety is the knowledge of how to serve the gods. Further, they will sacrifice to the gods and they keep themselves pure; for they avoid all acts that are offenses against the gods,

and the gods think highly of them: for they are holy and just in what concerns the gods.”<sup>5</sup>

To understand the meaning of the highest Good, one must realize that it represents a life which is ordered according to nature. The Stoic sage understood that Providence rules the world; consequently he did not desire nature to be changed to suit his own emotions. In acting according to the dictates of duty, he taught, man will not be guided by pragmatic concerns. In his inner life he will avoid all emotionalism and, instead, display a passionless temperament.

### SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

The Stoics applied their philosophy not merely to their daily conduct but also to social institutions. In education, for instance, they believed that luxury is to be avoided and children are to be brought up in a simple, almost Spartan, manner. They felt it important to teach respect and discipline. Emotionalism they discouraged; hence, they instructed the young student in ways of disciplining himself and acquiring self-control.

The ideal they upheld was simplicity and frugality. We should not forget, they urged, that our characters disintegrate when we depend on too many material conveniences. Let us bring up our children, then, to get along without superficialities and without constantly asking for more material goods. It is especially necessary for children to obey their parents and for family life to be harmonious. In marriage we are not to be tempted by external things. Thus, as Musonius Rufus tells us, we are to concentrate more on the soul of our partner than on her physical characteristics. Marriage is not to be based on selfish grounds but on a desire for mutual benefit and co-operation.

The Stoics were influential in humanizing the treatment of slaves. Slavery is not a natural condition, they asserted, and in the universal Stoic brotherhood all men are equal. This statement does not imply that revolutionary measures should be taken; rather, we should respect others even when they serve us and are in our power.

Especially strong is the note of universalism found in the Stoics: We belong not to one city or to one state but to the *world*. As citizens of the universe we are all equal in the sight of God. All class distinctions are illusory, and social position is not an absolute Good. We must cultivate an attitude of humility, for nothing lasts and everything is subject to the universal flux.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

In the Stoics the distinction between citizens and barbarians vanishes. Notice how different this spirit is from that of Aristotle, who looked with contempt upon those who did not share the fruits of Greek culture. The Stoics quite truly believed in a universal brotherhood in which complete equality reigns.

Unlike the Epicureans, the Stoics did not think political activity inconsistent with virtue. In fact, they tried hard to lift the tone of political discussion. In their rhetoric they taught aspiring politicians that truth is more important than success. They believed simplicity of style rather than eloquent words to be the marks of real education.

In Stoicism a note of humanitarianism predominates. No wonder that Stoic philosophers like Epictetus and Seneca protested against the gladiatorial games and tried to bring about a more enlightened legal system! Every man, they asserted, is an end in himself and is not to be treated as an object. In short, *personalistic* strains prevail in Stoicism.

### RELIGIOUS IDEALS

The philosophy of Stoicism is buttressed by an intense faith in the divine government of the universe. God is the principle that rules all of nature. He is active in everything—in the skies, in the beauty of our natural surroundings, and in man's soul. Consequently the Stoics felt that the worship of God and the recognition of his majesty must be the primary function of mankind. But how do we know that God exists? How can atheism be repudiated?

First of all, the Stoics appealed to the universal notion regarding the existence of God. Such a concept cannot be derived from human beings themselves. It must be the product of the divine governor, who has implanted this idea in the minds of men.

Second, the Stoics believed that man's reason has a divine origin. Certainly, they maintained, we cannot assume that we are the creators of rational ideas. Only a supreme being can be the source of the universal reason. As a corollary to this argument the Stoics pointed to the existence of the planets and their obedience to definite laws. All this indicates the work of God.

In the third place, the Stoics emphasized the unity of the universe. All its parts, they explained, are held together and are harmonious. The universe amidst constant change and development would disintegrate were it not for the work of a supreme being.

In the fourth place, the Stoics pointed to man. He does not exist by mere chance, they argued; rather, he must have been created by

a divine design. This argument again leads to the belief in the existence of God.

In the fifth place, the Stoics used a moral argument. If God does not exist, they claimed, there can be no piety—in fact, all virtues are shattered. Atheism, consequently, means the denial of universal laws and universal Providence. Piety, they maintained, is universal and must have an object, namely, God.

In the sixth place, the Stoics pointed to popular beliefs, especially in divination. Posidonius was eloquent on this subject, but almost all the Stoic philosophers believed in it. They regarded nature as a symbol of the divine quality, and they believed the voice of God is revealed within man.

It must not be forgotten that the Stoics affirmed the goodness of the gods, who were viewed as the benefactors of mankind. They did not accept Homer, who frequently pictured the gods as mortal and full of passions; rather, they emphasized the rational and spiritual nature of the deities.

While the Epicureans claimed that the gods are completely quiescent and isolationist, the Stoics affirmed that the gods are forever active and frequently intervene in the universe. All the activities of the gods, they claimed, are designed to promote the virtue of man, to give him a cosmic view, and to heighten the divine qualities of life.

As can be seen from all these observations, Stoicism produced a new religious philosophy which tried to rationalize and spiritualize popular beliefs. It pictured the pantheon of the gods in moral terms and gave allegorical explanations for the orthodox beliefs. Furthermore, the Stoics spoke of divine messengers and spirits who intervene between man and God. Some Stoics, like Posidonius, believed in good and evil spirits. They spoke of deified men, such as Hercules and Romulus, who were rewarded for their services by being included among the gods.

Although the early Stoics were skeptical regarding religious ritual, the later Stoics took an active part in it. Believing in the value of prayer, they held that the gods are to be constantly honored. Man should be grateful for his benefits, they maintained, and should realize how much he owes to the gods. In praying, they remind us, we should not ask for impossible blessings; nor must we consider our own individual advantages; rather, we must think of what is best for the universe. In fact, Stoics like Epictetus taught that we are to be guided by divine destiny and the divine will. The Stoics

were intent upon self-examination. According to many of their ablest teachers, at the close of each day we should reflect upon our actions. This examination is to purify our conscience, strengthen our virtue, and prevent the occurrence of evil.

As we can see, the Stoic religious attitude was dominated by moralistic considerations; it pictured an active relationship between man and the gods; and it gave a spiritual content to popular beliefs.

### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In their religious philosophy the Stoics could not avoid the problem of evil. Everywhere in the universe we find imperfection. The virtuous constantly suffer while the wicked seem to be prosperous. How, then, can evil be explained? How can it be understood by man's intellect?

First of all, the Stoics considered evil to be merely apparent, having no place in the ontological scheme of things. The universe as a totality is good, they insisted, and is guided by the designs of the gods. Furthermore, what men call evil, they believed, is often a blessing in disguise. We suffer sickness, we are tortured by pain, but all these vicissitudes may strengthen our moral resolve and show us the illusion of striving for external things. We may be exiled and persecuted for our political beliefs, but we should not be discouraged, since we must realize that there can be no permanent security and power, for fortune is unstable.

But, it may be objected, we frequently see the wicked on top while the most virtuous languish in jail. The Stoics reply that the wicked can never really triumph. On the contrary, their good fortune is only apparent and in fact their wickedness is increased by victory, for their souls inevitably suffer. Good men, however, cannot be touched by external events, for their souls remain free and untouched by fate.

The Stoics used still another argument to point out that evil is only apparent. What we call harmful and unpleasant may *strengthen* our souls. We are like athletes who exercise and train hard to achieve their goal. Our reverses and ordeals do not hurt us; on the contrary, they augment our moral capacities.

Another Stoic argument held evil to be merely the result of partiality. We look at the universe according to our own experiences, which are necessarily limited; but when we see things in their total perspective, evil has no real status and the providence of the gods is clearly manifested.

Some Stoics, like Seneca, asserted that God is limited. They meant that man has to co-operate with God if perfection is to be realized in the universe. According to other Stoic teachers, what we call evil is purely relative. In this reasoning they resurrected the Heraclitean argument that opposites go together. In short, no good without evil, no perfection without imperfection. We would not appreciate the Goods of life if we did not encounter occasional reverses.

Another problem suggests itself: Who is responsible for evil, God or man? The Stoics answered, God is *never* the source of evil; all vice can be traced to the misuse of our will, which is completely free. Let us take a concrete illustration. Imagine a burglar breaking into a house. He may be tempted by avarice or by his own poverty. In committing this crime he alone is to be held responsible, for his will consented to the action.

The Stoics taught that man is emancipated from evil when he cultivates genuine good will, when he learns the virtue of detachment and apathy, and when he acts according to the dictates of duty. In short, the Stoics pictured a moral universe in which true freedom can be gained through the study and practice of virtue. Unlike the Epicureans, the Stoics refused to accept pleasure as their goal in life and, instead, regarded virtue as an end in itself. Hence, in Stoicism we find the genesis of Christianity, which likewise has a moralistic perspective and which contends that all men are the children of God.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the sources of Stoic philosophy?
2. Describe the Stoic concept of virtue.
3. How did the Stoics explain the process of knowledge?
4. Enumerate and describe the various periods of Stoic philosophy.
5. What is the Stoic concept of religion?
6. Why did the Stoics refuse to accept the reality of evil?
7. What is the function of the logos?
8. Explain the world-view of the Stoics.
9. Compare Stoicism with Epicureanism.
10. Describe the ideal man of the Stoics.



*THE ROMAN SPIRIT OF*  
*PHILOSOPHY*

. . . . .

*THE FOUNDATIONS*

**T**he Roman Empire developed a system of laws and government which marked an important change in the history of civilization. The new system indicated that the city-state was obsolete and that the old national boundaries could no longer be maintained. While the Greeks had never been able to form a unified government, the Romans developed a world state which included a variety of races, all united under definite laws and Roman sovereignty.

The secret of Roman success lies not so much in Rome's military power as in the establishment of a unified system of laws. Roman law did not vanish with the collapse of the empire; even today many of the law courts of Europe, Latin America, and South Africa reflect the influence of Roman legal codes. At first, Roman law was unwritten; most of it dealt with religious usages. Then it was changed into civil law. In 449 B.C. concessions were made to the lower classes (the plebeians), and the civil law was written down in the Laws of the Twelve Tables.

As the Roman Empire expanded, these laws were applied to other Mediterranean nations. Thus, there developed the *jus gentium*, which was extended to the states conquered by Rome. Finally, during the period of the empire, the jurists systematized legal usages. Influenced by Stoic precepts, they emphasized *natural law*, which held that all men, regardless of origin, have certain innate rights and privileges and that all legal procedures should be guided by respect for the dignity of the human being. Between 528 and 534 A.D. Justinian codified the Roman Law, thus preserving it for modern times.

Behind this system of law lay a definite philosophy of government. The Roman state was able to expand so rapidly because, at least in early times, the individual subordinated himself to the welfare of the nation. Consequently, in Rome there was far less individualism than in Greece. Roman political theory stressed the need for a careful division in governmental responsibility. In other words, the legislative, judicial, and executive bodies of the government were separated.

Yet as Rome became stronger, class warfare became more pronounced. Reformers arose, like the Gracchi brothers, who wanted a better deal for the masses and therefore urged social and economic legislation; but they were defeated by the wealthy. By the end of the 2nd century B.C. the Roman government was in the hands of a small minority of opulent individuals, while the bulk of the people had no land and were suffering economic privations. Thus arose a shiftless proletarian class which had no interest in a stable government and was frequently led by demagogues who made extravagant promises.

The civil war between Marius and Sulla was more than a conflict of personalities. Marius represented the people, whereas Sulla championed the propertied interests. When Sulla was victorious, he instituted a reign of terror in Rome during which many lost their lives. The leaders of the common people were slaughtered.

Under Julius Caesar the first steps in the direction of totalitarianism were taken. He decreased the power of the senate and centralized governmental administration. His work was carried on by Augustus, who strengthened one-man government and tried to restore the old concepts of Roman piety. His descendants, however, did not live up to his ideals. One was Caligula, a madman; another was Nero, who distinguished himself by burning Rome, by wholesale murder in his family, and by persecution of the Christians.

In 69 A.D. a new family, that of the Flavian emperors, took over. They strengthened the Roman monarchy and improved empire

administration. At the same time they tried to secure the frontiers against the barbarian invasions. Now emperor worship became part of the Roman system of government.

The Flavian emperors were followed by the Antonines. Gibbon maintained that in this period Rome reached its climax, but perhaps Gibbon overidealized the reign of the Antonines. Three emperors especially were eminent in this period—Trajan, who expanded the Roman empire; Hadrian, who strengthened the internal administration of Rome; and Marcus Aurelius, who ruled as a philosopher-king.

During the next century the empire was convulsed by revolution and weakened by the growing power of the army. Diocletian and Constantine tried to stem the tide, but their efforts were in vain. The pressure of the barbarians became more pronounced; economic conditions grew more desperate; inflation was rampant; and political authority was weakened by public irresponsibility.

The decline of the Roman spirit did not occur suddenly but was the result of a gradual change. Tacitus, who wrote at the close of the 1st century A.D., already realized how Rome had altered. He compared the virtues of the Germans with the moral lethargy of the Roman citizens. The Roman family was disintegrating, he wrote, and young men had a passion for unusual vices instead of simple virtues, and were perverted by a philosophy of extreme hedonism.

It is quite certain that the Roman spirit was undermined by contact with Oriental ideals. From it arose the deification of the emperor, the decline of public morals, and the disregard of citizenship. The vices which came to Rome made for effeminacy in character. Many Roman citizens were so dedicated to sensual pleasures that they had no interest in the affairs of their government.

In inheriting Greek culture the Romans did not receive an un-mixed blessing. Greek studies became fashionable in society, but in taking up Greek literature many of the youth of Rome were led away from public duties and, instead, devoted themselves to philosophical speculation. It has frequently been pointed out that the Romans lacked originality in their speculation. Like modern Americans, they borrowed and imitated alien ideas. However, they did not assimilate them.

It can be readily understood that the Romans were far more skillful in applying their ideas than in developing new theories. They definitely lacked spiritual depth, and thus they were in constant danger of becoming intellectual parasites. Frequently in Roman

literature we find a spirit of satiety which indicates an immense weariness.

To some extent, the Romans were blessed with too many material goods, and thus they could not sufficiently appreciate the realm of the spirit. On the other hand, as Roman history developed, there arose a vast class which was denied any material privileges and was consequently ready to succumb to any type of superstition. In short, Roman culture provided for a multitude of contradictions which, in the long run, led to the downfall of the empire.

### ROMAN LITERATURE

Conventionally, Roman literature is divided into three periods. The first is the formative period, which lasted from approximately 300 to 100 B.C. It was marked by the development of comedy, especially by Plautus, who had a Rabelaisian sense of humor; and by Terence, who was more sophisticated and unlike Plautus did not appeal to the common people.

The second period is regarded as the height of Roman literature. Under the republic it saw the emergence of such outstanding writers as Catullus, Lucretius, Cicero, and Julius Caesar. Catullus specialized in love poems, which have seldom been surpassed in intensity of feeling and depth of passion. Representative is his poem *Love is all*:

“Let us, Lesbia darling, still  
 Live our life, and love our fill;  
 Heeding not a jot, howe’er  
 Churlish dotards chide or stare!  
 Suns go down, but ’tis to rise  
 Brighter in the morning skies;  
 But when sets our little light,  
 We must sleep in endless night.  
 A thousand kisses grant me, sweet;  
 With a hundred these complete;  
 Lip me a thousand more, and then  
 Another hundred give again.  
 A thousand add to these, anon  
 A hundred more, then hurry one  
 Kiss after kiss without cessation,  
 Until we lose all calculation;  
 So envy shall not mar our blisses  
 By numbering up our tale of kisses.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translation by T. Martin.

Lucretius and Cicero devoted themselves mainly to philosophy, while Julius Caesar became his own historian in *Commentaries on the Gallic wars*.

In the second period of this Golden Age we find another group of notable writers. Vergil is known to every schoolboy as the author of the *Aeneid*, which describes the triumphs of Rome and is expressive of the spirit of patriotism. Vergil celebrated the advantages of rural life in the *Georgics* and showed that country life is more serene than an urban existence.

Horace, who satirized Roman society, was a realistic critic of the social system of his time. His major contribution was in the development of lyrical odes.

Ovid was occupied with classical theology in his more serious moments; and in a lighter vein he dedicated himself to the problems of love, which he described in a completely natural manner.

Historical writing in this period was advanced by Livy, who believed that Rome was faced with disintegration. Through his writing he attempted to awaken a new sense of social responsibility and patriotism in the Roman citizen.

After Livy, Roman literature declined and finally entered the third period, the Silver Age (14-117 A.D.). Among the writers of this age were Seneca, the great Stoic philosopher; Martial, who used the epigram to describe the corruption of the society of his day; Juvenal, who satirized with a sense of futility; and Tacitus, a master stylist, who, through his *Germania*, tried to halt the decay of Roman society.

After this period Roman literature produced only mediocre figures. A religious tone, which found its climactic expression in *The consolation of philosophy* by Boethius, came more and more to prevail.

In general, Roman literature is not distinguished by originality. Borrowing freely from Greek models, it specialized in epic tales. It lacks the cosmic perspective of such dramatists as Aeschylus and Sophocles. It does not always adhere to the canons of good taste. It is often governed by didactic purposes instead of being concerned with an objective and universal account of life.

## CICERO

The eclecticism of the Roman spirit is well represented by Cicero. He was so deeply impressed by the conflict existing among the

various philosophical systems that he felt no intellectual certainty could be achieved. Hence, he relied on *probability* as his guide.

He tried to combine the features of the various philosophies, thus creating a mixture of Skepticism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism: "If it is a considerable matter to understand any one of the systems of philosophy singly, how much harder is it to master them all! Yet this is the task that confronts those whose principle is to discover the truth by the method of arguing both for and against all the schools. In an undertaking so extensive and so arduous, I do not profess to have attained success, though I do claim to have attempted it. At the same time it would be impossible for the adherents of this method to dispense altogether with any standard of guidance. This matter it is true I have discussed elsewhere more thoroughly; but some people are so dull and slow of apprehension that they appear to require repeated explanations. Our position is not that we hold that nothing is true, but that we assert that all true sensations are associated with false ones so closely resembling them that they contain no infallible mark to guide our judgment and assent. From this followed the corollary, that many sensations are probable, that is, though not amounting to a full perception they are yet possessed of a certain distinctness and clearness, and so can serve to direct the conduct of the wise man."<sup>2</sup>

In his religious doctrines Cicero firmly believed in the innate idea of God and rejected the mechanistic world-view of the Epicureans. Like the Stoics, he affirmed a belief in Providence and the government of the universe by divine design. Still, he did not believe in divination and had only contempt for oracles and sacrifices and poked fun at the cult of astrology. He thought the soul immortal, though in his private letters he did not touch upon life after death.

In his ethical system he did not agree with the Stoics that self-sufficiency is the end of life. He was too practical and had read too much of Plato and Aristotle. Thus he felt that external goods contribute to man's perfection.

In his political theories Cicero spoke of *universal* citizenship. He made much of the concept of natural law, which he regarded as the foundation of political authority. Because of natural law, he thought all men have definite rights and privileges. He made it clear that the state must be founded upon ethical authority and cannot be an end in itself. Among the various forms of government he preferred

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *On the nature of the gods*, Bk. 1 (Rackham's translation).

monarchy. His second choice was aristocracy. As for democracy, he had no sympathy whatsoever with this form of government.

### SENECA

More significant than Cicero's work is the philosophy of Seneca. He was born in 4 B.C. in Spain. Receiving an excellent education in his youth, he absorbed both Stoicism and Pythagoreanism. His father was extremely wealthy, and Seneca, through financial manipulations, added to the family fortune. For eight years he was exiled on the island of Corsica, but in 48 A.D. he was called back to become the tutor of Nero. Evidently he did not succeed too well in his system of education, for Nero was one of the worst rulers in Roman history. Eventually he incurred the enmity of his pupil, who charged that he had plotted against his life. Seneca, knowing what would result, chose the most graceful way out—suicide. In the final moments of his life he did not lose composure but remained calm and tranquil.

In Seneca's character we find strange contradictions. On the one hand, he possessed immense wealth; but on the other hand, he said a great deal about the advantages of poverty. It may be said to his credit, however, that he always lived simply and practiced the tenets of humanitarianism.

Among his works, especially impressive is a letter which he wrote to his mother during the first year of his exile. In it he told her that his miseries, after all, were not so great and that she should not grieve on his account. He had learned to find satisfaction and happiness in eternal things instead of relying on the fickle benefits of fortune. He had never been overcome by his prosperity, he wrote, and so now he could not be overwhelmed by his exile. To some extent, he was finding advantages in his fate, for now he had real leisure and could contemplate life objectively. He continued by pointing out that man needs very little to be happy. We are rich or poor not because of external advantages but because of the desires of the soul. The early Romans, he reminded his mother, had been poor, yet had they not lived a more heroic existence? Nor was he worried, so he told her, about public disgrace, for, after all, he had to be the judge of his own actions. He would be answerable for them. He reminded her that there are many sources of consolation. She should think of him as happy and cheerful and not worry about him. Above all, he advised her to study philosophy in order to heal her wounds and cure her sickness. Philosophy, he was certain, would banish all anxiety, all sorrow, and all distress.

Among the works of Seneca we find: *On anger*, *On the brevity of life*, *On the tranquillity of the soul*, *On clemency*, *On the constancy of the sage*, *On benefits*, *On providence*, *On a happy life*. The last treatise is especially revealing. The first chapter starts by showing that the happy life is not to be gained by searching for material advantages.

In his concept of education, Seneca neglected the sciences. He had little use for rhetoric, and he regarded the study of literature as academic. On the other hand, he had a high respect for philosophic discipline.

Seneca divided philosophy into three parts: moral, natural, and rational. "The first concerns our manners; the second searches the works of Nature; and the third furnishes us with propriety of words and arguments, and the faculty of distinguishing, that we may not be imposed upon with tricks and fallacies. The causes of things fall under natural philosophy, arguments under rational, and actions under moral. Moral philosophy is again divided into matter of justice, which arises from the estimation of things and of men; and into affections and actions; and a failing in any one of these disorders all the rest: for what does it profit us to know the true value of things if we be transported by our passions? or to master our appetites without understanding the when, the what, the how, and other circumstances of our proceedings? For it is one thing to know the rate and dignity of things, and another to know the little nicks and springs of acting. Natural philosophy is conversant about things corporeal and incorporeal; the disquisition of causes and effects, and the contemplation of the cause of causes. Rational philosophy is divided into logic and rhetoric; the one looks after words, sense, and order; the other treats barely of words, and the significations of them. Socrates places all philosophy in morals; and wisdom in the distinguishing of good and evil. It is the art and law of life, and it teaches us what to do in all cases, and, like good marksmen, to hit the white at any distance."<sup>3</sup>

He advocated the virtue of self-examination. Every night, he advised, we should ask ourselves searching questions. If we do this, we will have fewer vices and achieve peace of mind.

Seneca appealed to Providence, for he regarded God as a father who is concerned with all his children: "He keeps a strict hand over those that he loves, and by the rest he does as we do by our slaves; he lets them go on in license and boldness. As the master gives his

<sup>3</sup> Seneca, *On a happy life*, ch. 4.



most hopeful scholars the hardest lessons, so does God deal with the most generous spirits; and the cross encounters of fortune we are not to look upon as a cruelty but as a contest: the familiarity of dangers brings us to the contempt of them, and that part is strongest which is most exercised: the seaman's hand is callous, the soldier's arm is strong, and the tree that is most exposed to the wind takes the best root: there are people that live in a perpetual winter, in extremity of frost and penury, where a cave, a lock of straw, or a few leaves, is all their covering, and wild beasts their nourishment; all this by custom is not only made tolerable, but when it is once taken up upon necessity, by little and little, it becomes pleasant to them. Why should we then count that condition of life a calamity which is the lot of many nations? There is no state of life so miserable but there are in it remissions, diversions, nay, and delights too; such is the benignity of Nature toward us, even in the severest accidents of human life. . . . So that we should not only submit to God, but assent to him, and obey him out of duty, even if there were no necessity."<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this book Seneca indicated the disadvantages of the sensual life and castigated the Romans for making so many provisions for their bellies and paying so little attention to their virtues. Such sensuality can have no beneficial results, he averred; it can only undermine the body and lead to disease and infirmity. What, then, are the results of luxury? First, it leads to superfluity; then to wickedness; and finally men become slaves to their appetites.

He reminded us not to judge harshly the faults of others but to be conscious of our own shortcomings. He taught the virtue of mutual co-operation and the need for living for one another. Disregarding national boundaries, he spoke of one human society in which all are equal under the providence of God.

### EPICTETUS

Unlike Seneca, Epictetus was not blessed by material advantages, for he was a slave and suffered all his life from ill health. He attended Epaphroditus, one of the freedmen of Nero, who allowed him to be instructed in philosophy and later emancipated him from slavery. When the Stoic philosophers were banished by Domitian, Epictetus was included among them. He went to Nicopolis, where he opened a school in which he taught until he died.

The central doctrine of Epictetus is faith in God. He constantly spoke about the works of Providence. "And what words are suffi-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

cient to praise them and set them forth according to their worth? For if we had understanding, ought we to do anything else both jointly and severally than to sing hymns and bless the deity, and to tell of his benefits? Ought we not when we are digging and ploughing and eating to sing this hymn to God? 'Great is God, who has given us such implements with which we shall cultivate the earth: great is God who has given us hands, the power of swallowing, a stomach, imperceptible growth, and the power of breathing while we sleep.' This is what we ought to sing on every occasion, and to sing the greatest and most divine hymn for giving us the faculty of comprehending these things and using a proper way. Well then, since most of you have become blind, ought there not to be some man to fill this office, and on behalf of all to sing the hymn to God? For what else can I do, a lame old man, than sing hymns to God? If then I was a nightingale, I would do the part of a nightingale. If I were a swan, I would do like a swan. But now I am a rational creature, and I ought to praise God: this is my work; I do it, nor will I desert this post, so long as I am allowed to keep it; and I exhort you to join in this same song."<sup>5</sup>

We must realize, Epictetus wrote, that the spirit of God is within each one of us. Thus we must strive to uphold the dignity of the divine force.

He taught a philosophy of consolation. "Never say about any thing, I have lost it, but say I have restored it. Is your child dead? It has been restored. Is your wife dead? She has been restored. Has your estate been taken from you? Has not then this also been restored? But he who has taken it from me is a bad man. But what is it to you, by whose hands the giver demanded it back? So long as he may allow you, take care of it as a thing which belongs to another, as travelers do with their inn."<sup>6</sup>

Epictetus counsels us to behave in life as if we were attending a banquet: "Suppose that something is carried round and is opposite to you. Stretch out your hand and take a portion with decency. Suppose that it passes by you. Do not detain it. Suppose that it is not yet come to you. Do not send your desire forward to it, but wait till it is opposite to you. Do so with respect to children, so with respect to a wife, so with respect to magisterial offices, so with respect to wealth, and you will be some time a worthy partner of the banquets of the gods. But if you take none of the things which are set before

<sup>5</sup> Epictetus, *The discourses*, Bk. I, ch. xvi (translated by George Long).

<sup>6</sup> Epictetus, *The encheiridion*, or *Manual*, xi.

you, and even despise them, then you will be not only a fellow banqueter with the gods, but also a partner with them in power.”<sup>7</sup>

He reminds us that we are actors in a play and advises us to play our roles well. If we are put into this life as magistrates, we must exercise justice in our decisions. If we are paralyzed physically, we must not complain of an unhappy lot. It is not our task to select the part which has been given to us by God, who governs everything in the universe.

Epictetus believed the Golden Rule to be a valid precept for life. “When any person treats you ill or speaks ill of you, remember that he does this or says this because he thinks that it is his duty. It is not possible then for him to follow that which seems right to you, but that which seems right to himself. Accordingly, if he is wrong in his opinion, he is the person who is hurt, for he is the person who has been deceived; for if a man shall suppose the true conjunction to be false, it is not the conjunction which is hindered, but the man who has been deceived about it. If you proceed then from these opinions, you will be mild in temper to him who reviles you: for say on each occasion, It seemed so to him.

“Every thing has two handles, the one by which it may be borne, the other by which it may not. If your brother acts unjustly, do not lay hold of the act by that handle wherein he acts unjustly, for this is the handle which cannot be borne; but lay hold of the other, that he is your brother, that he was nurtured with you, and you will lay hold of the thing by that handle by which it can be borne.”<sup>8</sup>

The moral system of Epictetus is indeed magnificent. Condemning capital punishment, he urged legal reform, so that mercy would prevail. He certainly did not believe in slavery. In all his activities, he thought he was guided by God, and his piety almost reminds us of the Christian saints.

## MARCUS AURELIUS

While Epictetus was a slave, Marcus Aurelius was an emperor. He was educated in the Stoic school of philosophy and early in life was taught the virtue of simplicity. When he ascended the throne in 161 A.D., he was confronted by the rebellion of the barbarians and the insurrection of Parthia. Against his wish, he had to take command of his armies, and during the next years he tried to bring peace to the Roman Empire.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, XLII, XLIII.

Misfortune followed him wherever he went. One of his trusted friends, Cassius, was envious for the throne and rebelled. There were ugly rumors about his wife. His family was decimated by death, and only one child remained.

As emperor, Marcus Aurelius was charitable; he always aided those who were unfortunate, and he endowed educational and philosophical institutions. His record, however, was marred by his persecution of the Christians and by his appointment of Verus as co-emperor of the East, an act which in later years led to the permanent division of the Roman Empire. His son, Commodus, distinguished himself by unusual cruelty and by inefficient and corrupt empire administration.

In spite of these reverses we must not underestimate the idealism of Marcus Aurelius. In his *Meditations* we have the portrait of a noble man, intensely earnest and forever conscious of high moral purposes. He started his *Meditations* by acknowledging his debt to his family and teachers. He was grateful that he had been imbued with a love for philosophy and was blessed by a loving family, especially by a virtuous wife. Roman gossip had it otherwise, but evidently Marcus Aurelius was not disturbed by it.

We are not to be distressed, he tells us, by meeting unpleasant people, for we must realize that all of us are made for co-operation: "Begin the morning by saying to yourself: I shall meet with the busybody, the ungrateful, arrogant, deceitful, envious, unsocial. All these ill qualities they have by reason of their ignorance of good and evil. But I, who have seen the nature of the good (that it is beautiful) and of the bad (that it is ugly) and the nature of him who does wrong . . . can neither be injured by any of them (for no one can fix on me what is ugly) nor can I be angry with my kinsman, nor hate him. We are made for co-operation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth. To act against one another, then, is contrary to nature, and it is acting against one another to be vexed and to turn away."<sup>9</sup>

Marcus Aurelius reminds us that we may depart from life at any moment. In other words, we must regulate our thoughts and act with perfect justice. We can take comfort in the fact that the gods exist and provide for our welfare.

There are two types of knowledge: one stresses physical science, which Marcus Aurelius regarded as quite useless; the other is concerned with virtue: "Nothing is more wretched than a man who

<sup>9</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2:1 (translation by G. Long).

traverses everything in a round, and pries into things beneath the earth, as the poet says, and seeks by conjecture what is in the minds of his neighbors, without perceiving that it is sufficient to attend to the spirit within him, and to reverence it sincerely. And reverence of the spirit consists in keeping it pure from passion and thoughtlessness and dissatisfaction with what comes from gods and men. For the things from the gods merit veneration for their excellence; and the things from men should be dear to us by reason of kinship; and sometimes even, in a manner, they move our pity by reason of men's ignorance of good and bad; this defect being not less than that which deprives us of the power of distinguishing things that are white and black."<sup>10</sup>

Life, he pointed out, is in a constant state of flux, and the body is subject to decay. We cannot rely on fame, nor can we trust in fortune. What, then, can support a man? One thing, and only one—philosophy.

"But this consists in keeping the spirit within a man free from violence and unharmed, superior to pains and pleasures, doing nothing without a purpose, nor yet falsely and with hypocrisy, not feeling the need of another man's doing or not doing anything; and besides, accepting all that happens, and all that is allotted, as coming from thence, wherever it is, from whence he himself came; and finally, waiting for death with a cheerful mind, as being nothing else than dissolution of the elements of which every living being is compounded. But if there is no harm to the elements themselves in each continually changing into another, why should a man have any apprehension about the change and dissolution of all the elements? For it is according to nature, and nothing is evil which is according to nature."<sup>11</sup>

He counseled us to avoid all envy and suspicion and always to keep our thoughts sincere: "Do not waste the remainder of your life in thoughts about others, when you do not refer your thoughts to some object of common utility. For you lose the opportunity of doing something else when you have such thoughts as these: 'What is such a person doing, and why, and what is he saying, and what is he thinking of, and what is he contriving?' and whatever else of the kind makes us wander away from the observation of our own ruling power. We ought then to check in the series of our thoughts everything that is without a purpose and useless, but most of all the over-

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:17.

curious feeling and the malignant; and a man should accustom himself to think of those things only about which if one should suddenly ask, 'What have you now in your thoughts?' with perfect openness you might immediately answer, this or that; so that from your words it should be plain that everything in you is simple and benevolent, and such as befits a social animal, one that cares not for thoughts about pleasure or sensual enjoyments at all, nor has any rivalry or envy and suspicion, or anything else for which you would blush if you should say that you had it in your mind."<sup>12</sup>

We cannot find tranquillity, according to Marcus Aurelius, by seeking retreats in the country or by visiting the seashore. "But this is altogether a mark of the most common sort of men, for it is in your power whenever you shall choose to retire into yourself. For nowhere, either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble, does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that by looking into them he is immediately in perfect tranquillity; and I affirm that tranquillity is nothing else than the good ordering of the mind. Constantly then give to yourself this retreat, and renew yourself; and let your principles be brief and fundamental, which, as soon as you shall recur to them, will be sufficient to cleanse the soul completely, and to send you back free from all discontent with the things to which you return."<sup>13</sup>

We are to turn our thoughts to universal things; thus we fulfill our function as human beings: "In the morning when you rise unwillingly, let this thought be present: I am rising to the work of a human being. Why then am I dissatisfied if I am going to do the things for which I exist and for which I was brought into the world? Or have I been made for this, to lie in the bedclothes and keep myself warm?—But this is more pleasant.—Do you exist then to take your pleasure, and not at all for action or exertion? Do you not see the little plants, the little birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees working together to put in order their several parts of the universe? And are you unwilling to do the work of a human being, and do you not make haste to do that which is according to your nature?"<sup>14</sup>

While the final tone of Marcus Aurelius is melancholy, it contains a trace of hope. We are infinitesimal—our hope lies in living according to nature.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:1.

"What do you wish? To continue to exist? Well, do you wish to have sensation? Movement? Growth? And then again to cease to grow? To use speech? To think? What is there of all these things which seem to you worth desiring? But if it is easy to set little value on all these things, turn to that which remains, which is to follow reason and God. But it is inconsistent with honoring reason and God to be troubled because by death a man will be deprived of the other things.

"How small a part of the boundless and unfathomless time is assigned to every man! It is very soon swallowed up in the eternal. And how small a part of the whole substance! And how small a part of the universal soul! And on what a small clod of the whole earth you creep! Reflecting on all this, consider nothing to be great, except to act as your nature leads you, and to endure that which the common nature brings."<sup>15</sup>

Marcus Aurelius did not believe in immortality. His ethical system was not buttressed by the hope of life after death. An immense weariness prevails in his speculations. We have almost the feeling that Roman speculation had exhausted itself.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROMAN STOICISM

In summarizing the contributions of Stoicism, we find that it had an enormous impact on both ancient and modern civilization. Stoicism was not merely a system of theoretical speculation but a practical philosophy which changed the existing social institutions.

(1) Stoicism upheld the validity of natural law through which all men are equal and all men share basic rights.

(2) Stoicism portrayed the ideal traits of the Roman character, such as self-control, soberness, temperance, and dignity under all circumstances. It made the Roman character more humanitarian, especially through its attitude toward slavery and social amusements.

(3) Stoicism proclaimed the supremacy of reason. Man, thus, could best find himself by following his rational capacity and adhering to his sense of duty. Thus Stoicism anticipated the emergence of idealism, which we find later in the Kantian philosophy.

(4) Stoicism paved the way for the acceptance of Christianity. In fact, Stoicism markedly influenced the work of St. Paul, the greatest of the Christian apostles. Like Christianity, Stoicism preached the doctrine of love and universal co-operation, but the essential difference between Stoicism and Christianity lies in the *secular* outlook

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12:31-32.

of the Stoic thinkers. Generally their moral doctrines were not buttressed by a belief in immortality. Also, Stoicism regarded apathy as the highest virtue whereas Christianity teaches a full expression of emotions.

We must not neglect, however, some of the negative aspects of the Stoic gospel. Its antiscientific bias, its rejection of the heliocentric theory, its stress on austerity, its opposition to pleasure—all these views hindered the development of a balanced philosophical attitude. From a scientific standpoint Epicurean philosophy was far superior to Stoicism, for it avoided the concept of design, was less anthropomorphic, and gave a systematic and natural account of the universe.

Still, we must not underestimate the contribution of Stoicism to philosophy and civilization. Seldom have moral teachings been explained so fervently and so impressively as they were by such thinkers as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Their books will always remain as milestones of Roman civilization, as symbols of an unconquerable faith, and as expressions of the greatness of a genuine morality.

#### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can the strength of Roman civilization be explained?
2. What were the major contributions of Rome to world civilization?
3. Describe the spirit of Roman literature.
4. How can happiness be achieved, according to Seneca?
5. How did Seneca criticize contemporary Roman society?
6. What was the view of Epictetus regarding Providence?
7. Describe the life and philosophy of Marcus Aurelius.
8. What are the conclusions of Marcus Aurelius regarding human happiness?
9. Why has Marcus Aurelius been popular in the history of philosophy?
10. What were the main interests of Roman Stoicism?



# CONTRIBUTIONS OF SKEPTICISM

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## SIGNIFICANCE

It has been the custom of many historians of Greek philosophy to neglect the concepts of Skepticism. Very often they devote only a few pages to the Skeptics. They regard them as minor incidents in the stream of Greek knowledge and as representatives of a decadent philosophy, thus contrasting the constructive and affirmative philosophies of Plato and Aristotle with the destructive and relativistic philosophies of the Skeptics. Such a view, however, does not rest upon an objective examination of Skeptical philosophy. Thinkers like Carneades and Aenesidemus compare very favorably with the outstanding philosophers of Greece, such as Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> What the Skeptics lacked in speculative boldness they made up in profound and scintillating criticism.

The Greek Skeptics are particularly significant from the standpoint of modern philosophy, which likewise is based on the method of doubt and which is suspicious of any absolute foundations. In

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brochard, *Les Sceptiques grecs*; Maccoll, *The Greek Sceptics, Pyrrho to Sextus*; Patrick, *The Greek Sceptics*.

many ways we have returned to the wisdom of the Skeptics, and, like them, we are satisfied with a partial and tentative evaluation of the universe.

While the philosophy of ancient Skepticism was to some extent destructive, it was at the same time a *liberating* influence. It emphasized the fact that the mind of man must be emancipated from old superstitions and unexamined biases and that without such a purge no valid philosophical speculation can be carried on. Because of this emphasis, Skepticism became the foundation of science. If it had triumphed permanently, Greek science would have been more empirical and would have made a more significant contribution to civilization.

Skepticism, however, was destined to become only an interlude in the intellectual history of ancient times; and, with the rise of the various religious philosophies, its teachings lost their force and were soon forgotten.

Greek Skepticism can be divided into three periods. The first saw the work of such philosophers as Pyrrho and Timon. It was the formative period of Skepticism, during which its attacks were especially directed against ethical absolutism.

The second, or middle, period was under the sway of Arcesilaus and Carneades. Its center was, strangely enough, the Platonic Academy. In this period the Stoics were especially attacked, and the concept of probability was developed in an exact form.

The third period of Skepticism was dominated by medical studies, and during it Skepticism reached its maturity under the leadership of Aenesidemus, Agrippa, and Sextus Empiricus. After these thinkers, the Skeptical influence waned. During the Middle Ages it was almost nonexistent.

### THE ORIGIN OF SKEPTICISM

The Skeptical influence was never absent in Greek thought, for the Greek mind, from the very beginning, believed in a tolerant and many-sided interpretation of life and the universe. The variety of gods, the differences among the religious cults, the contrast between idealism and actuality—all these factors were bound to create a Skeptical attitude. As we have noticed, even in the cosmological period of Greek thinking a marked Skepticism arose, especially in the system of Xenophanes. He stated that all gods are interpreted and evaluated according to human examples and that we project various human traits and idiosyncrasies upon the deities.

The same criticism was made by Heraclitus, who likewise believed his contemporaries deluded when it came to the worship of the gods. Heraclitus also showed that the universe changes constantly and the senses alone are not to be trusted. Heraclitus exerted a powerful impact upon the Skeptics by his concept of relativity and his belief that opposites are one. The Skeptics, on the other hand, did not accept the affirmative part of his philosophy, for unlike the Stoics they did not believe that the universe is governed by reason and that all change exemplifies definite cosmic laws.

Besides Heraclitus, the influence of Democritus is noteworthy. The latter, as we have noted, had a deep influence on the Epicureans. The Skeptics also appreciated him; from him they absorbed an understanding of the mechanical arrangement of nature, namely, that necessity governs everything, and a touch of agnosticism regarding the existence of the gods. Incidentally, the ethical theory of Democritus also played a role in Skepticism, for he believed in cheerfulness, which was to be the result of proper intellectual and emotional orientation. The Skeptics, in a similar vein, maintained that a correct intellectual attitude leads to moral emancipation of the individual.

Even more influential than Democritus in their impact on Skepticism were the Sophists. To them, as we have noted, the fundamental problem of philosophy was man; and they adhered to relative rather than universal standards. But the difference between the Sophists and the Skeptics lies in the fact that the Sophists did not arrange their doubts in a systematic manner, whereas the Skeptics developed a most coherent and well-defined philosophy.

The Sophists, it must also be remembered, were teachers of rhetoric. They believed it possible to teach the art of public speaking and statesmanship. The Skeptics, on the other hand, did not have a high regard for social and political affairs. They believed more strongly than the Sophists in living apart from society. Of course, certain exceptions can be noted, especially in the case of Carneades, who represented Athens in a very important diplomatic mission to Rome. Generally speaking, however, the statement holds true. The Sophists lived in a climactic period of Greek development, while the Skeptics were living in an age already showing signs of decline and disintegration.

The development of Skepticism was also aided by Socrates. To the Skeptics, Socrates was noteworthy because of his method of questioning. Like Socrates, the Skeptics stressed self-examination;

but, unlike him, they did not arrive at categorical conclusions. They rejected Socrates' view of the world as governed by Providence; instead, they appealed to a strictly scientific interpretation of the universe. Still, we must not minimize the influence of Socrates on Skepticism, for many of the Skeptics used the same method. They, too, had the market place as their classroom; they, too, regarded themselves as gadflies; and they, too, thought it their task to make their fellow-citizens less complacent and less pretentious in their views of religion and morality.

The direct successors of Socrates, such as the Megarics, the Cynics, and the Cyrenaics, stimulated the development of Skepticism by raising many questions regarding the validity of sense knowledge and by studying various logical fallacies. The *nominalism* of the Cynics and Cyrenaics certainly was a preliminary attack against all universal standards. We find many of the same arguments in the Skeptics, who, however, were more extreme in their denial of universal truth.

Strangely enough, the philosophy of Plato also became a tool of the Skeptics. Not that they believed in the theory of Ideas, but they used the Platonic arguments in their thesis that the physical world is subject to change and that man's perception is not to be trusted. Plato had made a basic distinction between opinion and knowledge. The Skeptics reduced all knowledge to *mere opinion* and thus indicated that no absolute conclusions can be held.

Many of the arguments of the Skeptics resemble the arguments of Epicureanism. Especially in the realm of religion is the similarity between the two movements striking. Like the Epicureans, the Skeptics did not believe in Providence; nor did they accept divination. Therefore their philosophy bears a completely scientific character.

It has been occasionally suggested that Buddhism exerted an influence on the Skeptical movement. Pyrrho had visited India, and he may possibly have come into contact with the Buddhist way of thinking, but there is no definite verification for this conjecture. We can find several similarities: like Buddhism, the Skeptical philosophy was antimetaphysical, regarding cosmological problems as insignificant and believing in emancipation from external things. But Skepticism was less nihilistic than Indian Buddhism. Its main foundations were *scientific, not religious*.

Above all, we must not neglect the impact of medicine upon Skeptical philosophy. Greek medicine was divided into two camps.

One was theoretical, based on philosophic abstractions; the other was severely empirical and made a detailed investigation of diseases. The empirical school of medicine abhorred any type of vagueness. It stressed the fact that diseases can be cured only through analytical study of anatomy and physiology. In this respect it was far superior to medieval medicine, which was frequently subordinated to theological beliefs.

To read the writings which have been ascribed to Hippocrates, the father of Greek medicine, is to receive the impression of an experimental mind. He used the inductive method and thought all conclusions not based on actual observation likely to be fallacious. His knowledge of the bones and muscles was up-to-date, although his theories regarding the nervous system were primitive. He showed the limitations of Greek science by his assertion that the body is made up of four elements—earth, water, fire, and air—and that it consists of four types of fluids—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. These theories strike the modern student of medicine as quite naive and unscientific, but Hippocrates, we must remember, had a naturalistic concept of health and appreciated the effect of climatic factors upon the human body. Furthermore, his ideals regarding the medical profession as contained in the Hippocratic Oath are still being followed in our own time.

The progress of medicine was especially promoted in Alexandria. There Herophilus distinguished himself by researches in the structure of the eye and the function of the brain. Erasistratus made valuable discoveries regarding the functions of veins and arteries. It was in Alexandria that notable advances were made in surgery and theoretical medical research, which extended not only to human beings but also to animals.

All these trends had a marked influence upon the Skeptical philosophers. We note, for example, that Heraclides of Tarent was one of the teachers of Aenesidemus, who achieved exactness of observation under the impact of the broad experimental influence of his teacher. In short, the empirical school of medicine proved to be an intense stimulus to the Skeptical movement. It indicated that philosophy must be based on observation and experiments and that it cannot progress by the use of generalizations. The empirical school of medicine also demonstrated that advancement in philosophy does not depend upon a complete unification of all theories but is best achieved through a better understanding of *specific* facts and *specific* concepts.

## THE ENEMIES OF SKEPTICISM

To appreciate the immense contributions of Skepticism, we must understand the objects of its attacks. Skepticism was especially opposed to the Stoic philosophy. Almost in every way the Skeptics denied the validity of the Stoic arguments. They certainly did not believe in pantheism, nor did they regard virtue as an end in itself. Nor did they accept the Stoic explanation of divination and the existence of the gods. Most of the time the Skeptics looked down on the Stoic sages, whom they regarded as extremely credulous and rather naive in their outlook upon the universe.

The Skeptics not merely attacked the Stoics but included in their assaults the other schools of philosophy, especially the Platonists and Aristotelians. They tried to demolish the elaborate cosmological systems of both Plato and Aristotle by showing that they were based on a false assumption regarding human knowledge. According to the Skeptics, man cannot achieve an understanding of first principles, and reason cannot present us with a superior reality. In short, like Voltaire, the Skeptics claimed that metaphysics is essentially a waste of time and only leads to confusion.

It must be remembered that they were ardent students of history. Many of them traveled a great deal; everywhere they observed how customs and institutions differ. What was held in honor by one nation was ridiculed by another. The taboos of one city were cheerfully accepted by another. No wonder the Skeptics did not believe in absolute standards and stressed *suspension of judgment!*

In reading the Skeptical treatises, especially Sextus Empiricus, we find a rather sophisticated spirit which reminds us somewhat of 20th-century philosophy. The Skeptics were attempting to fight against the biases of the popular mind. They were trying to eradicate the false conceptions taught by religion. In this attempt they championed intellectual freedom, which, to them, was the only hope for humanity.

It is important to realize that the Skeptics did not view philosophy as an absolute science. The philosopher, to them, had no superior insight and no special revelations of reality. Rather, he was a critic of contemporary institutions and of prevalent ideas, and he demonstrated how man's mind can be purified from obsolete traditions. If Skepticism had triumphed, it would have led to a reconstruction of philosophy; but it was defeated, and thus the spirit of criticism was long quiescent in the history of civilization.

## PYRRHO

Pyrrho is generally regarded as the founder of the Skeptical tradition. He was born at Elis *c.* 360 B.C. and is said to have lived to a very ripe old age. In his youth he was a remarkable student, especially of literature and science, and very early in his development he took up the study of philosophy. His teachers introduced him to the Megaric and Democritean systems.

Adventure entered Pyrrho's life when he accompanied Alexander the Great on his expedition to India. After the death of Alexander he went back to Elis, where he spent the remaining years of his life. He earned his living as a teacher and, like Socrates, believed in a very informal method of instruction. His teaching was not restricted to those who were especially interested in philosophy but was extended to the common people. According to his friends, he possessed amazing self-control and serenity. Toward physical pain he showed no fear. It is said that when he underwent an operation he expressed no emotion whatsoever.

Pyrrho was held in high esteem by his contemporaries, who regarded him as a great teacher and were proud of him as lending intellectual luster to Elis. Despite his Skepticism, he adhered to established laws since he had no desire to become a revolutionary. Ironically enough, his life was far more fortunate than that of Socrates, although he was intellectually more subversive than the latter.

The philosophy of Pyrrho is based on the concept that we can know only phenomena. Reason, then, cannot give us a knowledge of first principles. We are presented with certain experiences which we interpret according to certain philosophical tenets. Throughout his life, Pyrrho noted how philosophers differ among themselves and how theoretical assertions cannot be considered absolute. He was skeptical regarding any definite method of achieving truth. While some believe in the senses, he thought it was only too well established that the senses are fallible. Those who feel confident in reason, likewise, have little ground for certainty, for reason, too, presents us merely with relative standards and depends upon our own state of enlightenment and upon the culture in which we live.

What then is the best attitude? To Pyrrho, it was an open mind and a tentative evaluation of all the facts of our existence. To some extent he was less absolute in his doubts than the later Skeptics. Hence, he did not assert categorically that there is no truth. He did not believe that the search for definite knowledge should be

abandoned. On the positive side, he thought the most adequate method leads to the suspension of judgment. In other words, any type of dogmatism must be shunned.

What, then, are the basic elements in the Skeptical attitude? Pyrrho believed, first of all, in doubt. It is better for the philosopher, he taught, to deny things than to affirm them categorically. When we are confronted by any intellectual problem, we must consider it carefully and see all its aspects, without hastening to a spontaneous conclusion. We are to keep our minds open all the time and not make categorical assertions.

In his ethical philosophy, Pyrrho exhibited the same spirit as in his view of epistemology and metaphysics. Like the Sophists, he believed ethical standards to be entirely *relative*. We cannot find, accordingly, universal certainty in ethics. What is condemned by one society may be accepted by another. Yet ethical distinctions are not to be neglected. The wise man will pay due regard to them and adhere to custom. Like Hume in the 18th century, Pyrrho was a conservative when it came to following established institutions.

It is significant to note that the ethical ideal of Pyrrho was not entirely negative, for he believed that the right kind of intellectual and emotional adjustment leads to freedom and to true serenity. If our minds do not adhere to any set standards, Pyrrho asserted, we are emancipated from prejudice and achieve a genuine freedom which leads to an autonomy of the soul.

### TIMON

Most of our information about Pyrrho comes from the testimony of Timon, one of his students. Timon started his career as a dancer in the theater but soon tired of dancing and devoted himself to philosophy. At first he was interested in the Megaric system, but when convinced of its inadequacy he became an adherent to the philosophy of Pyrrho. He was an indefatigable traveler. We find him in Macedonia, in Elis, and in Athens. He was fond of the pleasures of life and, unlike Pyrrho, had an Epicurean strain in his character.

Timon stated that there is no absolute truth. He attacked the convictions of the conventional philosophers and satirized their views in a treatise called *Silli*. The book takes us to Hades, where an argument between the various schools of philosophy takes place. All sides are shown to be inadequate and are ridiculed in the most eloquent terms. Only two philosophers are exempt—Pyrrho and Xe-



nophanes. In this work Timon showed how the Pyrrhonic method could be used in clearing up the disputes of philosophy and in achieving intellectual clarity.

### ARCESILAUS

Like Timon, Arcesilaus had a wide intellectual background. He not only was interested in science and in the arts but was also adept in logic. He studied under Theophrastus, who was a superior teacher and gave him the foundation for his scientific knowledge. Later he joined the Academy and became one of the noted teachers of his time. He was in contact with many of the princes and kings and was sent on diplomatic missions by the Athenians. Immensely popular, he was an impressive scholar and re-introduced the Socratic method of argument, thus making philosophy more exciting. Abandoning formal lectures when he became head of the Academy, he taught his students how to be independent in their assertions and how to defend their viewpoints. It was his aim to point out the contradictions of the various intellectual systems and to show that probability, not certainty, must be our guide.

The main attack of Arcesilaus was directed against the Stoics, who had claimed that one can achieve universal knowledge based on irresistible impressions. The Stoics, moreover, had made a sharp distinction between the wise man, who knows the truth, and the masses, who live merely by opinion. These views were sharply contradicted by Arcesilaus. Do we have a definite standard of knowledge? Arcesilaus answered in the negative. All knowledge, he thought, rests on opinion. There is no definite distinction between falsehood and truth. For example, the impression of our dreams is just as irresistible as the perceptions of our waking existence. The opinion of the fool is just as definite as the opinion of the wise man. Knowledge of a thing, in short, does not present us with immediate certainty; it only gives us *probable* and *relative* standards which have to be verified by experience.

The result of this discussion is the acceptance of relativity. We must suspend our judgment, Arcesilaus emphasized, when it comes to intellectual matters, for we cannot make any definite assertions. As for the Stoic concept of epistemology, it was based on an uncritical acceptance of certainty, he felt, and it was his task to destroy the foundations of the Stoic system.

In his ethical ideals Arcesilaus taught that knowledge of moral laws is secondary. What matters most is *action*. According to his

belief, man experiences and feels certain things before he thinks about them. To live a meaningful life we do not have to be philosophers; rather, we should be practical.

Unlike the Stoics, he did not regard virtue as an end in itself. We know that he believed in the pleasures of life and occasionally was not above showing off his learning. Yet he was invariably generous with his material goods and always ready to help a friend in need. In Arcesilaus, thus, we find a delightful mixture of hedonism and skepticism.

### CARNEADES

Arcesilaus was surpassed by Carneades, who likewise turned against Stoic philosophy. He was born *c.* 213 B.C. and died in 129. He was adept in the systems of philosophy which existed in his time, especially in Stoicism, and his teaching was both scholarly and full of vitality. He was especially skilled in argumentation and often confused his students about his real opinions because he was able to present many sides of an argument.

When he went to Rome as one of the elected Greek ambassadors, in 155 B.C., he made a deep impression on the Roman people. The reason for the trip was the Athenian pillaging of an allied city, for which the Athenians were required to pay a large indemnity. They desired a reduction; hence they sent a diplomatic mission to Rome.

Carneades spoke before distinguished audiences in Rome. Among his listeners were Cato, the indefatigable enemy of Greek culture, and other outstanding leaders.

Carneades one day spoke in defense of justice and showed that the Roman Empire was based on this ideal. The following day he took the contrary position and indicated that Rome had expanded through power politics and a disregard for the laws of justice. He proved that the Romans had violated treaties, destroyed their rivals, and were intent upon the elimination of Carthage because of this lust for power. Certainly Rome was not motivated by idealistic concepts, he pointed out, but had become master of the world through shrewd manipulation of other nations. He indicated that in international politics, as in other social relations, there can be *no absolute standards*. The action of the Athenians, he therefore concluded, was not to be condemned, for they had only imitated the principles of the Romans.

We can imagine the shock to the conservative Romans, especially Cato. Here was a teacher of youth who openly declared that moral

standards are not to be followed. It is not surprising to learn that Cato determined to prevent the growth of Greek philosophy in Rome. But he could not stem the tide, and ultimately the spirit of Carneades triumphed.

In his theory of knowledge Carneades, like his predecessors, held that no definite criterion for truth is possible. Reason, he showed, cannot present us with absolute standards, for it is not based on immediate certainty; its proofs always rest on *relative* standards. The system of dialectic is full of weaknesses; it ends in a vicious circle. Dialectic, being concerned with the formal relations of propositions, cannot give us an understanding of the content of experience.

Nor does truth, Carneades reminds us, rest upon an intuitive basis. If this were so, there would be an absolute standard of knowledge; but the history of philosophical and scientific opinions demonstrates that no concept is held universally and acknowledged by all. Carneades pointed to the incessant intellectual warfare. Philosophers can never agree among themselves; they are always at odds. There is no reason, according to him, to suppose that complete certainty can be achieved in philosophical arguments. We adhere to various schools and opinions because of *personal biases*, not because of our love for truth.

This is not all. What we think, what we believe, what we accept, depends on our emotional condition. Intellectual verities thus do not exist in a vacuum but depend upon our previous adjustment and our previous outlook on life. Furthermore, Carneades felt, the senses present us with a constant flux. What appears to us as true at one time may be false at another. We see an object, then we attribute various qualities to it, and we jump to a conclusion as to its nature. It is much better, he believed, to suspend our judgment in regard to it. If we do so, both science and philosophy may advance at a more secure rate.

What impresses us especially in the philosophy of Carneades is his *scientific* outlook. He advocated that probability be our guide. There are three stages in this process of probability. We start first with a simple probability which is applied to an isolated idea. This is a low degree of probability, for we are not aided by a knowledge of other concepts and we cannot verify our beliefs.

There is a higher state of probability, which is *undisputed*. Now we can unite an idea with other concepts without being contradicted. We can take a certain action on the basis of previous knowledge and previous experience.

The highest type of probability, however, is one which can be both *tested* and *verified*. Intellectually, we can develop a system of ideas which have worked in the past and been proved valid. It is this type of probability which should guide our knowledge and our intellectual endeavors.

To make the meaning of Carneades concrete, let us imagine we are trying to select a good teacher. We have a candidate who appears to have fine traits. This represents the first degree of probability. Now we look up his past record, which indicates high intellectual achievement. This is undisputed probability. Finally we observe him in action, and we make a complete investigation of his relations with his colleagues, students, and parents. We find him to be excellent. Thus we have achieved the highest stage of probability.

Just as in his theory of knowledge, so we find a scientific spirit in the ethics of Carneades. His speech before the Roman senate indicated that he did not believe in absolute moral standards. The Stoics, then, were wrong when they stressed the universality of ethics. Moral codes merely hide human selfishness. In the case of individuals, moral laws may hold true; but when it comes to nations, they are usually violated.

Like Hobbes in the 17th century, Carneades upheld self-interest. Away, then, with abstract principles of right and justice! Away with superficial idealism!

Like the Sophists, Carneades believed we must study ethics in a realistic sense without imposing our ideals on the universe. The standard is nature, he declared, implying that external goods are not to be shunned and asceticism is not the *summum bonum*. The wise man will not disregard the experience of the senses. He will be careful of his health and try to live in comfort. In short, the Stoic concept of apathy was not welcomed by Carneades.

In turning to Carneades' theory of religion, we find that he undermined the basis of Stoic theology.

"We will begin with the question of the First Principles of the Universe, and since most theories agree in holding that there are causes of two kinds, material causes and active causes, we will begin by discussing the active causes. These causes are said to count for more than the material ones. Now the majority of philosophers have asserted that the supreme active cause is God. We will first, therefore, see how the matter stands with God. But there is one preliminary statement which we must make. We Skeptics follow in

practice the way of the world, but without holding any opinion about it. We speak of the gods as existing and offer worship to the gods and say that they exercise providence, but in saying this we express no belief, and avoid the rashness of the dogmatists."<sup>2</sup>

According to Carneades, we cannot understand the essence of God: "For if they say that God controls everything, they make him the author of evil things; if, on the other hand, they say that he controls some things only, or that he controls nothing, they are compelled to make God either grudging or impotent, and to do that is quite obviously an impiety."<sup>3</sup>

### CLITOMACHUS

Our knowledge of Carneades comes mainly through Clitomachus, his disciple, who was born in Carthage. For a short period Clitomachus conducted his own school in Athens, but later he returned to the Academy and became its head after the death of Crates. Unlike Carneades, he was more of a commentator and most of the time repeated the theories of his predecessors. Like Carneades, he believed that the best intellectual attitude is one which leads to the suspension of judgment and that any type of intellectual absolutism must be avoided. The arguments of the various schools of philosophy, he showed, rest upon intellectual vanity, and no definite certainty can be found.

After Clitomachus, the Academy reverted to dogmatism. This reversion was apparent to some extent under Philo of Larissa, who modified the Skepticism of Carneades and affirmed the power of reason. He wanted to go back to original Platonism. This return was fully accomplished under Antiochus, the student of Philo, who at first was a Skeptic but later turned to dogmatism. He lectured in Rome and Alexandria, as well as at the Academy.

Antiochus was primarily interested in ethics. He attacked absolute Skepticism, maintaining that any standard of probability is based on some kind of certainty. To adopt a coherent philosophy, he maintained, we need conviction. In these arguments he foreshadowed the viewpoints of modern idealists, especially Josiah Royce. The modern idealist, like Antiochus, believes that relative truth only points to absolute truth and that all fragmentary parts of experience are connected.

<sup>2</sup> *Sextus Empiricus*, Hypotyp. iii (quoted in Bevan, *Later Greek religion*, p. 52).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

## AENESIDEMUS AND THE PROBLEM OF CAUSALITY

Probably the most significant representative of Skepticism was Aenesidemus. With him the scene shifted to Alexandria, which then became the center of the movement. We know very little about his life. Authorities differ as to his exact dates, but we can be quite certain that he lived in the 1st century B.C.

Among his works were *Against wisdom*; *Investigation*; *Pyrrhonic sketches*; *The first introduction to principles*; and eight books of *Pyrrhonic discourses*. None of the books has survived except *Pyrrhonic discourses*, which we find quoted in a book by Sextus Empiricus.

Aenesidemus summarized the Skeptical philosophy in his ten tropes, which indicate that the only valid intellectual attitude is one which leads to a suspension of judgment. The first argument, or trope, shows that different impressions are produced according to differences in animals. "This we infer both from the differences in their origins and from the variety of their bodily structures. Thus, as to origin, some animals are produced without sexual union, others by coition. And of those produced without coition, some come from fire, like the animalcules which appear in furnaces; others from putrid water, like gnats; others from wine when it turns sour, like ants; others from earth, like grasshoppers; others from marsh, like frogs; others from mud, like worms; others from asses, like beetles; others from greens, like caterpillars; others from fruits, like the gall-insects in wild figs; others from rotting animals, as bees from bulls and wasps from horses. Of the animals generated by coition, some—in fact the majority—come from homogeneous parents, others from heterogeneous parents, as do mules. Again, of animals in general, some are born alive, like men; others are born as eggs, like birds; and yet others as lumps of flesh, like bears. It is natural then, that these dissimilar and variant modes of birth should produce much contrariety of sense-affection, and that this is a source of its divergent, discordant, and conflicting character." <sup>4</sup>

The variety of impressions depends on the various sense organs. "Thus, in respect of touch, how could one maintain that creatures covered with shells, with flesh, with prickles, with feathers, with scales, are all similarly affected? And as for the sense of hearing, how could we say that its perceptions are alike in animals with a

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Bk. 1, p. 27.

very narrow auditory passage and those with a very wide one, or in animals with hairy ears and those with smooth ears? For, as regards this sense, even we ourselves find our hearing affected in one way when we have our ears plugged and in another way when we use them just as they are. . . . So too with the objects of taste; for some animals have rough and dry tongues, others extremely moist tongues. We ourselves, too, when our tongues are very dry, in cases of fever, think the food proffered us to be earthy and ill-flavored or bitter—an affection due to the variation in the predominating juices which we are said to contain. Since, then, animals also have organs of taste which differ and which have different juices in excess, in respect of taste also they will receive different impressions of the real objects.”<sup>5</sup>

The second argument is based on the differences in men. “For even if we grant for the sake of argument that men are more worthy than irrational animals, we shall find that even our own differences of themselves lead to suspense. For man, you know, is said to be compounded of two things, soul and body, and in both these we differ one from another.

“Thus, as regards the body, we differ in our figures, and ‘idiosyncrasies’ or constitutional peculiarities.”<sup>6</sup>

The third argument appeals to the differences in sensation. “Thus to the eye paintings seem to have recesses and projections, but not so to the touch. Honey, too, seems to some pleasant to the tongue but unpleasant to the eyes; so that it is impossible to say whether it is absolutely pleasant or unpleasant. The same is true of sweet oil, for it pleases the sense of smell but displeases the taste. . . . Rain-water, too, is beneficial to the eyes but roughens the windpipe and the lungs; as also does olive oil, though it mollifies the epidermis. The cramp-fish, also, when applied to the extremities produces cramp, but it can be applied to the rest of the body without hurt. Consequently, we are unable to say what is the real nature of each of these things, although it is possible to say what each thing at the moment appears to be.”<sup>7</sup>

Aenesidemus taught that nature does not create things according to our sense experience. The concept of nature itself is contradictory. “For he who decides the question as to the existence of Nature will be discredited by them if he is an ordinary person, while if he

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31–33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–57.

is a philosopher he will be a party to the controversy and therefore himself subject to judgment and not a judge. If, however, it is possible that only those qualities which we seem to perceive subsist in the apple, or that a greater number subsist, or, again, that not even the qualities which affect us subsist, then it will be non-evident to us what the nature of the apple really is. And the same argument applies to all other objects of sense. But if the senses do not apprehend external objects, neither can the mind apprehend them; hence, because of this argument also, we shall be driven, it seems, to suspend judgment regarding the external underlying objects.”<sup>8</sup>

The fourth argument depends on circumstances. “And this Mode, we say, deals with states that are natural or unnatural, with waking or sleeping, with conditions due to age, motion or rest, hatred or love, emptiness or fullness, drunkenness or soberness, predispositions, confidence or fear, grief or joy. Thus according as the mental state is natural or unnatural, objects produce dissimilar impressions, as when men in a frenzy or in a state of ecstasy believe they hear daemons’ voices, while we do not. . . . Also, the same water which feels very hot when poured on inflamed spots seems lukewarm to us. And the same coat which seems of a bright yellow color to men with blood-shot eyes does not appear so to me. And the same honey seems to me sweet, but bitter to men with jaundice.”<sup>9</sup>

The fifth argument is founded on difference in position, distance, and place. “For owing to each of these the same objects appear different; for example, the same porch when viewed from one of its corners appears curtailed, but viewed from the middle symmetrical on all sides; and the same ship seems at a distance to be small and stationary, but from close at hand large and in motion; and the same tower from a distance appears round but from a near point quadrangular.

“These effects are due to distances; among effects due to locations are the following: the light of a lamp appears dim in the sun but bright in the dark; and the same oar bent when in the water but straight when out of the water . . . and sound seems to differ in quality according as it is produced in a pipe, or in a flute, or simply in the air.”<sup>10</sup>

Objects thus are viewed not as they are in themselves, but according to their position and distance. “Since, then, all apparent ob-

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-71.



jects are viewed in a certain place, and from a certain distance, or in a certain position, and each of these conditions produces a great divergency in the sense-impressions, as we mentioned above, we shall be compelled by this Mode also to end up in suspension of judgment. For in fact, anyone who purposes to give the preference to any of these impressions will be attempting the impossible. For if he shall deliver his judgment simply and without proof, he will be discredited; and should he, on the other hand, desire to adduce proof, he will confute himself if he says that the proof is false, while if he asserts that the proof is true he will be asked for a proof of its truth, and again for a proof of this latter proof, since it also must be true, and so on *ad infinitum*. But to produce proofs to infinity is impossible; so that neither by the use of proofs will he be able to prefer one sense-impression to another. If, then, one cannot hope to pass judgment on the afore-mentioned impressions either with or without proof, the conclusion we are driven to is suspension; for while we can, no doubt, state the nature which each object appears to possess as viewed in a certain position or at a certain distance or in a certain place, what its real nature is we are, for the foregoing reasons, unable to declare.”<sup>11</sup>

The sixth argument is based on the fact that all objects come together and are mixed. “That none of the external objects affects our senses by itself but always in conjunction with something else, and that, in consequence, it assumes a different appearance, is, I imagine, quite obvious. Thus, our own complexion is of one hue in warm air, of another in cold, and we should not be able to say what our complexion really is, but only what it looks like in conjunction with each of these conditions. And the same sound appears of one sort in conjunction with rare air and of another sort with dense air; and odors are more pungent in a hot bathroom or in the sun than in chilly air; and a body is light when immersed in water but heavy when surrounded by air.

“But to pass on from the subject of external admixture—our eyes contain within themselves both membranes and liquids. Since, then, the objects of vision are not perceived apart from these, they will not be apprehended with exactness; for what we perceive is the resultant mixture, and because of this the sufferers from jaundice see everything yellow, and those with blood-shot eyes reddish like blood.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71–73.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73–75.

Aenesidemus demonstrated how the mind adds to this mixture and thus leads to confusion. "Nor yet does the mind apprehend it, since, in the first place, its guides, which are the senses, go wrong; and probably, too, the mind itself adds a certain admixture of its own to the messages conveyed by the senses; for we observe that there are certain humors present in each of the regions which the Dogmatists regard as the seat of the "Ruling Principle"—whether it be the brain or the heart, or in whatever part of the creature one chooses to locate it. Thus, according to this Mode also we see that, owing to our inability to make any statement about the real nature of external objects, we are compelled to suspend judgment."<sup>13</sup>

The seventh argument is based on the quantity and constitution of objects. "And chips of the marble of Taenarum seem white when planed, but in combination with the whole block they appear yellow. And pebbles when scattered apart appear rough, but when combined in a heap they produce the sensation of softness. . . . And wine strengthens us when drunk in moderate quantity, but when too much is taken it paralyzes the body. So likewise food exhibits different effects according to the quantity consumed; for instance, it frequently upsets the body with indigestion and attacks of purging because of the large quantity taken."<sup>14</sup>

To substantiate his argument, Aenesidemus appealed to medicine. "As a general rule, it seems that wholesome things become harmful when used in immoderate quantities, and things that seem hurtful when taken to excess cause no harm when in minute quantities. What we observe in regard to the effects of medicines is the best evidence in support of our statement; for there the exact blending of the simple drugs makes the compound wholesome, but when the slightest oversight is made in the measuring, as sometimes happens, the compound is not only unwholesome but frequently even most harmful and deleterious. Thus the argument from quantities and compositions causes confusion as to the real nature of the external substances. Probably, therefore, this Mode also will bring us round to suspension of judgment, as we are unable to make any absolute statement concerning the real nature of external objects."<sup>15</sup>

The eighth argument is based on relativity, which has a twofold meaning. "And this statement is twofold, implying, firstly, relation to the thing which judges (for the external object which is judged

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

appears in relation to that thing), and, in a second sense, relation to the accompanying percepts, for instance the right side in relation to the left. Indeed, we have already argued that all things are relative—for example, with respect to the thing which judges, it is in relation to some one particular animal or man or sense that each object appears, and in relation to such and such a circumstance; and with respect to the concomitant percepts, each object appears in relation to some one particular admixture or mode or combination or quantity or position.”<sup>16</sup>

Aenesidemus considered all things to be relative. “Moreover, some existent things are similar, others dissimilar, and some equal, others unequal; and these are relative; therefore all things are relative. And even he who asserts that not all things are relative confirms the relativity of all things since by his arguments against us he shows that the very statement ‘not all things are relative’ is relative to ourselves, and not universal.

“When, however, we have thus established that all things are relative, we are plainly left with the conclusion that we shall not be able to state what is the nature of each of the objects in its own real purity, but only what nature it appears to possess in its relative character. Hence it follows that we must suspend judgment concerning the real nature of the objects.”<sup>17</sup>

The ninth argument is founded on the constancy or rarity of an occurrence. “The sun is, of course, much more amazing than a comet; yet because we see the sun constantly but the comet rarely we are so amazed by the comet that we even regard it as a divine portent, while the sun causes no amazement at all. If, however, we were to conceive of the sun as appearing but rarely and setting rarely, and illuminating everything all at once and throwing everything into shadow suddenly, then we should experience much amazement at the sight. An earthquake also does not cause the same alarm in those who experience it for the first time and those who have grown accustomed to such things. How much amazement, also, does the sea excite in the man who sees it for the first time! And indeed the beauty of a human body thrills us more at the first sudden view than when it becomes a customary spectacle. Rare things too we count as precious, but not what is familiar to us and easily got.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

The tenth argument relates to morals and laws. All things are determined by custom. "For example, we oppose habit to habit in this way: some of the Ethiopians tattoo their children, but we do not; and while the Persians think it seemly to wear a brightly dyed dress reaching to the feet, we think it unseemly. . . . And law we oppose to law in this way: among the Romans the man who renounces his father's property does not pay his father's debts, but among the Rhodians he always pays them; and among the Scythian Tauri it was a law that strangers should be sacrificed to Artemis, but with us it is forbidden to slay a human being at the altar. And we oppose rule of conduct to rule of conduct, as when we oppose the rule of Diogenes to that of Aristippus or that of the Laconians to that of the Italians. . . . And we oppose dogmatic conceptions to one another when we say that some declare that there is one element only, others an infinite number; some that the soul is mortal, others that it is immortal; and some that human affairs are controlled by divine Providence, others without Providence."<sup>19</sup>

Even more significant than Aenesidemus' general statement of Skepticism is his attitude regarding causality. His arguments are summarized in eight modes.

"Of these the First, he says, is that which shows that, since aetiology as a whole deals with the non-apparent, it is unconfirmed by any agreed evidence derived from appearances. The Second Mode shows how often, when there is ample scope for ascribing the object of investigation to a variety of causes, some of them account for it in one way only. The Third shows how to orderly events they assign causes which exhibit no order. The Fourth shows how, when they have grasped the way in which appearances occur, they assume that they have also apprehended how non-apparent things occur, whereas, though the non-apparent may possibly be realized in a similar way to the appearances, possibly they may not be realized in a similar way but in a peculiar way of their own. In the Fifth Mode it is shown how practically all these theorists assign causes according to their own particular hypotheses about the elements, and not according to any commonly agreed methods. In the Sixth it is shown how they frequently admit only such facts as can be explained by their own theories, and dismiss facts which conflict therewith though possessing equal probability. The Seventh shows how they often assign causes which conflict not only with appearances but also with their own hypotheses. The Eighth shows

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-89.

that often, when there is equal doubt about things seemingly apparent and things under investigation, they base their doctrine about things equally doubtful upon things equally doubtful.”<sup>20</sup>

Notice how in his arguments Aenesidemus attacked the dogmatic assumptions. He explained that hypotheses are chosen in an arbitrary way and that philosophers view the world according to their own prejudices. Throughout his discussion of causation Aenesidemus revealed his scientific learning. He made it clear that we can not argue about the immaterial world. Those who define the invisible realm are wasting their time. We do not know what it is like, for our knowledge rests on analogy, which necessarily is faulty.

It must be noted that Aenesidemus also developed a metaphysical system of his own in which, influenced by Heraclitus, he stated that air is the world substance. Commentators do not agree as to the significance of this metaphysical system, and some believe it merely represents an earlier stage of his development.<sup>21</sup>

Generally, Aenesidemus was antimetaphysical. He did not believe in any ultimate principles and did not accept any absolute categories. To him, neither science, religion, nor morality revealed any final truth. Knowledge, he felt, must end in tentative evaluations. No large-scale assertions can be made; in everything we must be guided by relativity.

### AGRIPPA

The Skeptical system of Aenesidemus was elaborated by Agrippa, who lived in the 1st century A.D. He proposed five tropes against the dogmatic philosophers. The first relates to the conflict of opinions; the second is based on the fact that every proof requires another proof; the third is founded on the uncertain and relative nature of sensation; the fourth states that proof should not rest on unproved axioms; and the fifth, that reasoning inevitably is involved in a circle.

In these arguments Agrippa restated the contentions of his predecessors and also attacked the foundations of logical knowledge. The result is that he denied any kind of intellectual certainty. Let us abandon, then, any type of metaphysical speculation! Let us give up all metaphysical dogmatism! Instead, Agrippa taught, let us rely on the suspension of judgment, which alone will lead to a successful life.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-105.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Patrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-237.

## MENODOTUS

The scientific aspect of Skepticism was especially evident in the work of Menodotus (70-150 A.D.). He was very bitter in his attack on the Stoics. He also objected to the Skepticism of the Academy and its theory of probability. He held that it is impossible for one concept to be more probable than another.

## SEXTUS EMPIRICUS

The life of Sextus Empiricus is surrounded by obscurity. We have three of his volumes from *The Pyrrhonic hypotyposes*, and six books, *Against the schoolmasters*, which contain attacks against the teachers of grammar, orators, geometricians, arithmeticians, astrologers, and musicians. The third work is *Against the dogmatic philosophers* (5 books), which consists of his objections to the logicians, the natural philosophers, teachers of ethics, and the system of morals propounded by the ethical thinkers. *Against the schoolmasters* and *Against the dogmatic philosophers* are usually united in eleven books under the title *Against the mathematicians*.

Sextus Empiricus is best known as the *historian* of Skepticism. He showed how the categories of science, such as causality, space, and number, contradict one another. Mathematics, then, is not absolute, but purely relative. So, too, is logic. In other words, no type of universality can be obtained.

All this should not deter us in our scientific quest, said Sextus Empiricus, for science can advance best when it is based on *specific* factors and when it uses the method of exact observation and analytical experimentation.

In his ethical theory, Sextus Empiricus followed the earlier Skeptics. All standards are relative and full of contradiction, he declared; and he indicated how philosophers have differed in their view of the final Good for man.

What then is the best attitude? How should we act in society? Sextus Empiricus urged conservatism and advocated following the past. In adjusting ourselves to the existing institutions we can best develop peace of mind and thus pursue our scientific interests.

## LUCIAN

The influence of Skepticism extended to the field of literature as well as to science, especially in the work of Lucian, who lived about 120-200 A.D. He was a teacher of rhetoric and a prolific traveler.

He visited, among other cities, Antioch, Rome, and later Athens. In his writings he used the method of satire and constantly exposed the folly of mankind.

Most interesting from the standpoint of philosophy is Lucian's *Zeus tragoedus*. It deals with a debate between Timocles, a Stoic thinker, and Damis, an Epicurean. The debate is being watched by the gods. Zeus is especially concerned and asks Hermes, the divine messenger, if the debate has been going on for a long time.

"Hermes: Not yet; they were still skirmishing—slinging invective at long range.

Zeus: Then we have only, Gods, to look over and listen. Let the Hours unbar, draw back the clouds, and open the doors of Heaven. Upon my word, what a vast gathering! And I do not quite like the looks of Timocles; he is trembling; he has lost his head; he will spoil everything; it is perfectly plain, he will not be able to stand up to Damis. Well, there is one thing left us: we can pray for him. Inwardly, silently, lest Damis hear.

Timocles: What, you miscreant, no Gods? no Providence?

Damis: No, no; you answer my question first; what makes you believe in them?

Timocles: None of that, now; the *onus probandi* is with you, scoundrel.

Damis: None of that now; it is with you.

(Zeus: At this game ours is much the better man—louder-voiced, rougher-tempered. Good, Timocles; stick to invective; that is your strong point; once get off that, he will hook and hold you up like a fish.)

Timocles: I solemnly swear I will not answer first.

Damis: Well, put your question then; so much you score by your oath. But no abuse, please.

Timocles: Done. Tell me then, and be damned to you, do you deny the Gods exercise providence?

Damis: I do."<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the dialogue Damis has the stronger argument. Finally Timocles appeals to syllogism.

"Timocles: See whether this is a sound syllogism; can you upset it? If there are altars, there are Gods: there *are* altars; therefore there are Gods. Now then.

<sup>22</sup> *Zeus tragoedus* (Bevan, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-163).

*Damis:* Ha, ha, ha! I will answer as soon as I can get done with laughing.

*Timocles:* Will you never stop? At least tell me what the joke is.

*Damis:* Why, you don't see that your anchor (sheet-anchor too) hangs by a mere thread. You depend on connexion between the existence of Gods and the existence of altars, and fancy yourself safe at anchor! As you admit that this was your sheet-anchor, there is nothing further to detain us.

*Timocles:* You retire; you confess yourself beaten then?

*Damis:* Yes; we have seen you take sanctuary at the altars under persecution. At those altars I am ready (the sheet-anchor be my witness) to swear peace and cease from strife.

*Timocles:* You are playing with me, are you, you vile body-snatcher, you loathsome, well-whipped scum! As if we didn't know who your father was, how your mother was a harlot! You strangled your own brother, you live in fornication, you debauch the young, you unabashed lecher! Don't be in such a hurry; here is something for you to take with you; this broken pot will serve me to cut your foul throat."<sup>23</sup>

The gods are worried. Zeus asks what action should be taken. Hermes consoles him.

*"Zeus:* Damis makes off with a laugh, and the other after him, calling him names, mad at his insolence. He will get him on the head with that pottery, I know. And now, what are we to do?

*Hermes:* . . . It is no such terrible disaster if a few people go away infected. There are plenty who take the other view—a majority of Greeks, the body and dregs of the people, and the barbarians to a man."<sup>24</sup>

### THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF SKEPTICISM

To sum up the contributions of Skepticism: It gave a scientific foundation to ancient philosophy. It pointed out that both our sense knowledge and our reason are untrustworthy and that the best intellectual attitude is one of doubt and suspension of judgment.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171–172.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



In metaphysics Skepticism believed we cannot speak of a superior reality, for we cannot make any valid intellectual assertions about the immaterial realm. To some extent this view implies that all metaphysical discussions are sterile and that it is best to adopt a specific and experimental view of the universe.

In its attitude regarding science, Skepticism protested against abstraction. It thereby tried to separate philosophy and science. More than any other school of philosophy, Skepticism believed in the verification of knowledge.

In the realm of ethics the Skeptics pointed to the relativity of all moral standards. They attacked the Stoic doctrine that virtue is all-important. As we have noted, their method of doubt did not lead to revolutionary efforts or to any attempts to reform mankind.

In their method of investigation, the Skeptics resurrected the Socratic approach. Knowledge, they showed, begins with a profession of ignorance, but the end process of knowledge likewise indicates our inability to know and understand first principles. Unlike the Stoics, the Skeptics did not accept irresistible impressions; to them the process of knowledge was entirely relative.

In short, all the categories of science, religion, and morality were subjected to a searching criticism by Skepticism, which pointed to the inevitable limitations of the human mind. The universe of the Skeptics was purely mechanical; it contained no first cause, no divine soul, and no Providence.

As a consistent philosophical movement, Skepticism did not re-emerge until the Renaissance. Then Montaigne and Pomponazzi resurrected the doctrines of doubt and subjected the existing forms of knowledge to a thoroughgoing criticism. Thenceforth, doubt has reigned supreme in modern thinking, thereby vindicating the wisdom of the ancient Skeptics.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What movements influenced the rise of Skepticism?
2. Describe the philosophical achievement of Carneades.
3. How did Pyrrho aid the progress of Skepticism?
4. Why were the Skeptics opposed to Stoic philosophy?
5. What was the Skeptic viewpoint of causality?
6. What were the ethical conclusions of the Skeptics? How do their moral principles compare with those of Socrates?
7. Discuss the ten tropes. What is their significance?
8. Describe the contributions of Aenesidemus.
9. What were the weaknesses of Skepticism?

## PHILO'S PHILOSOPHY

. . . . .

### THE HEBREW CHARACTER

**T**o appreciate Philo we must understand the Hebrew character, which is one of the most self-contradictory in history. This paradox was found as early as Biblical times. In the Bible we find, on the one hand, the capitalistic and thoroughly Epicurean figure of Solomon; on the other hand, the socialistic and puritanical Amos.

The Hebrews were, perhaps, the most realistic of all peoples. Since their survival was constantly threatened, they seemed to live in a perpetual state of undeclared war. They were never quite certain when the sword of antagonism would be turned against them. In Alexandria, Philo's native city, they achieved all the privileges of power, yet within a few years they were subjected to persecution. Uncertainty of human existence, thus, was always impressed upon the Hebrew mind. No wonder the Hebrews developed a penetrating insight into human character! At the same time, almost against their better judgment, they hoped for a new society in which the old hatreds would be forgotten.

### THE HUMAN GOD

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Hebrews has been their concept of God. Jehovah is a very human deity, and he was con-

ceived according to the patterns, ideals, and interests of his chosen people. In early times Jehovah was fairly simple. He was a war god who promised to destroy all those who oppressed the Hebrews. He was fierce in his anger, promising to punish children for the sins of their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. His morality was often inferior to that of man; Moses, several times, had to persuade him to control himself and to moderate his wrath. That Jehovah made mistakes is apparent: he regrets the fact that he made man, and he regrets his covenant with the Hebrews. He is talkative and repetitious; his speeches are long-winded, and he is not above jealousy. Strong are his curses, for we read:

"If, however, you will not heed the injunctions of the Lord your God by being careful to observe all his commands and statutes which I am commanding you today, then all the following curses shall come upon you and overtake you. 'Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country; . . . Cursed shall be the offspring of your body, and the produce of your soil, the issue of your cattle, and the progeny of your flock; Cursed shall you be in your coming, And cursed shall you be in your going.'"<sup>1</sup>

Belief in one personal God meant for the West that there could be only *one* true religion. Thus, worship of God often became a compulsive rather than a liberative force.

## MAN AND MORALS

Next to belief in one God, the Ten Commandments rank high among Hebraic contributions. It is difficult to know whether this legacy of the Old Testament has benefited or harmed the development of a genuine reflective morality. It is true that the Ten Commandments solidified family relationships, imbued children with reverence for their fathers and mothers, encouraged a sense of honesty, and spoke strongly against killing; but, at the same time, they hindered civilization by identifying morality with divine commandments. This is a most serious weakness, for moral laws are constantly changing, not eternal. Furthermore, the categorical form of the Ten Commandments led to authoritarianism.

The Ten Commandments had a decided influence upon the artistic stagnation of the Hebrews, for the Second Commandment makes it very clear that no graven images are to be made of God. Those who later followed the Hebraic patterns, especially the Calvinists, were

<sup>1</sup> *Deuteronomy* 28:15-19 (Smith and Goodspeed version).

firm opponents to any type of esthetic activity and thus impeded the growth of civilization.

The Ten Commandments are symbolic of the *patriarchal* spirit. The Tenth Commandment is especially instructive when it says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's." Women, thus, were regarded as possessions. The same attitude prevails in modern times when love is intimately associated with the pride of ownership. In the Ten Commandments there are indications that the behavior between the sexes is divinely regulated—a concept which has dominated humanity for thousands of years.

The moral system of the Old Testament gave powerful support to the priestly class, which developed numerous taboos associated with the religious ritual and saw to it that the laws were followed strictly. This moral system led to two types of standards: one for the chosen group and one for outsiders. This dualism has continued throughout civilization and constitutes the real ethical foundation of modern nationalism.

### MEN AND PROPHETS

In the prophets, the Hebrew religion reached its climactic expression. However, the greatness of the prophets has been exaggerated. If they had triumphed, what type of religion would have emerged? Certainly there would have been love for Jehovah, kindness to man, and avoidance of social abuses, but religion, at the same time, would have been somewhat puritanical and would have led to a literal type of ceremonialism. A piety would have emerged to rival orthodox Hinduism.

The prophets had a distinct sense of mission. They were imbued with the thought that they were speaking directly for God. Socrates also felt he was guided by an inner voice and this fact made him certain of his destiny and rather arrogant in spite of his outward show of modesty. According to the prophets, there is only *one* way of life. Their main theme was that worshiping other gods would bring destruction to the Hebrews, and yet, in many ways, this worship of the other gods was extremely colorful and esthetically satisfying.

On the positive side the prophets expanded the concept of Jehovah, whose warlike activities were now minimized. They were conscientious objectors to war and vigorously attacked the abuses of

the social system of their time. With them religion became more subjective, a matter of the spirit rather than of external ritual.

Probably the greatest influence of the Hebrews has been felt in their association of religion with *social causes*. Too often religion has been considered merely an experience of the supernatural; too often it has been merely an aid to primitive magic. According to the prophets, there can be no genuine understanding of life which is isolated from the social ideals of humanity. Thus, we read in Isaiah:

"Hear the word of the Lord,  
Ye rulers of Sodom;  
Give ear unto the law of our God,  
Ye people of Gomorrah.  
To what purpose is the multitude of your  
sacrifices unto Me?  
Saith the Lord;  
I am full of the burnt offerings of rams,  
And the fat of fed beasts;  
And I delight not in the blood  
Of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats,  
When ye come to appear before Me.  
Who hath required this at your hand,  
To trample My courts?  
Bring no more vain oblations;  
It is an offering of abomination unto Me;  
New Moon and sabbath, the holding of convocations—  
I cannot endure iniquity along with the solemn  
assembly.  
Your new moons and your appointed seasons  
My soul hateth;  
They are a burden unto Me:  
I am weary to bear them.  
And when ye spread forth your hands,  
I will hide Mine eyes from you;  
Yea, when ye make many prayers,  
I will not hear;  
Your hands are full of blood.  
Wash you, make you clean,  
Put away the evil of your doings  
From before Mine eyes,  
Cease to do evil;

Learn to do well;  
 Seek justice, relieve the oppressed,  
 Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."<sup>2</sup>

The prophets had various concepts of Jehovah. To Amos he was a puritanical guardian of the moral law; to Isaiah he was a stern monarch of all nations. To Jeremiah he was an all-powerful psychoanalyst, who knew the motives of men. To Ezekiel he was an arbitrary judge, and to Deutero-Isaiah he was a deliverer and saviour.

The prophets stressed the theme of love, but it was not complete and categorical love. Repeatedly the threats of God were revealed, and the prophets almost gloated over the picture of torment for sinners and extermination for foreign nations. Ultimately, their work strengthened the power of the orthodox rabbis just as Bernard and Francis later aided in the formal expansion of the Church organization.

It is a truism that prophets are misunderstood in their time. Usually, however, they are even more misinterpreted by later generations. In history there is a perpetual conflict, as Bergson has shown, between the legalistic ritual of the ecclesiastical leaders and the spontaneous outlook of the great prophets. Usually the unorthodox part of their teachings is discarded by the religious authorities, who appropriate only the conservative elements.

### THE PESSIMISTIC SPIRIT

The philosophical genius of the Hebrews appears perhaps most vividly in *Ecclesiastes*, one of the masterpieces of pessimism. It expresses an underlying melancholy spirit which coincides with the disintegration of Hebrew political power.

"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

"A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

"If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.

<sup>2</sup> *Isaiah* 1:10-17.

"For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.

"Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.

"Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?"<sup>3</sup>

The feeling of life's futility had been intensified, not only by persecutions but by a deep emotional sensitivity. *Ecclesiastes* speaks for the wisdom of age, which, after surveying the goods of life, finds only vanity.

Pessimism has two sources. On the one hand there is a pessimism of the oppressed, which we find in the novels of Dostoevski, Dickens, and Victor Hugo. This type is conditioned by the unbearable burden of life. On the other hand there is a pessimism caused by satiation. In *Ecclesiastes* all the so-called Goods of life are tasted—wealth, fame, women, wisdom—but the result is only futility.

"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

"What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.

"The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

"The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

"All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

"Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

"There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ecclesiastes* 6:1-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ecclesiastes* 1:2-11.

This pessimistic religion is reserved for the few; it can never make much headway with the masses, who want strong drugs and absolute promises. Thus, the popular religion of the two centuries before Christ was filled with speculations about the future world and proclaimed the hope of a Messiah. More and more stress was placed upon the struggle between the forces of good and evil, especially in the *Book of Daniel*. These religious ideas were associated with an intensification of nationalistic feeling. There was bitter hatred on the part of the masses against the Greek and later against the Roman invaders. When the masses rebelled, they fought not so much for the spiritual ideals of the prophets as for the temple, for national glory, and for a future Messiah.

### PHILO'S BACKGROUND

All the contradictions of the Hebrew character appear in Philo. His philosophy represents a strange mixture of rationalism and religion. He was well-educated in the Greek classics and had a wide acquaintance with the Greek thinkers, but his Hebraic training remained triumphant to the end.

Philo did not apologize for the Hebrew concept of God. He was not ashamed of his heritage. On the contrary, he thought the Jewish religion constituted the highest form of spiritual endeavor.

It was no accident that Philo's philosophy developed in Alexandria, for here was a cosmopolitan background. In this city all types of philosophy mingled. There were Skeptics, Platonists, followers of Aristotle, Stoics, Epicureans, and later on Neo-Platonists. Here Hebrew and Christian theology was being formulated. Alexandria was also a fertile soil for the philosophies of Persia and India. Side by side we find the most abject superstition and the most advanced scientific theory. In this atmosphere there was a high degree of intellectual tolerance. There was little room for philosophical absolutism; in the conflict among the various philosophical movements, a diffusion of ideas took place. No one philosophical standpoint was bound to be triumphant. This fact made for eclecticism and for a union of the various philosophical tendencies.

In many ways Philo's philosophy represents such a spirit, for it symbolizes a wedding of Greek and Hebrew ideals. However, he remained true to his Hebrew heritage. As early as Philo's time, many of his religious brethren were deserting the faith. Attracted by the promise of security and the desire for complete equality, they joined



the pagan cults. With bitterness Philo denounced their actions, which he regarded as almost treasonable.

While Philo borrowed a great deal from earlier Greek philosophy, especially from Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, he was not an uncritical admirer of their systems. For example, in his concept of the *logos*, he marked a new departure and used the word in a sense different from that of the Stoics.

He did not agree with Aristotle's concept that the world has no beginning nor with Aristotle's opposition to Platonic Ideas. He followed Plato in a more literal way, but his philosophy is not to be regarded as an imitation of Platonism, for he was guided by his Hebraic training and regard for revelation.

The difference between Plato and Philo lies in their main assumptions. Plato believed that the universe can be understood through reason; Philo, however, stressed the importance of *faith* and regarded revelation as the real source of philosophical inspiration.

It goes without saying that Philo was vigorously opposed to the pre-Socratic thinkers. He could not tolerate their materialism and disregard for spiritual factors. Any purely mechanical explanation of the universe, he felt, was bound to fail. Like Plato, he emphasized the supremacy of the immaterial world, and he conceived of matter as an expression of a higher spiritual reality.

Even more severe was his criticism of the Sophists. In every way, he thought, they had betrayed the basic ideals of philosophy. Their championship of relativity, agnosticism, and humanism—all these views aroused his irate criticism.

In the same manner Philo turned against the Epicureans, who had interpreted the universe in a mechanistic manner. Such a system he regarded as inadmissible. He believed that the Epicurean philosophy of life was superficial and subversive. He could never allow a purely scientific explanation, for to him it was inferior to religious truths.

While there was a Skeptical strain in Philo's philosophy, it was not an end in itself. To doubt for the sake of doubting, he regarded as unworthy of a philosopher. On the contrary, his doubt had a definite purpose. Through it he tried to indicate the limitations of human reason and the need for a new type of adjustment contained in faith. Thus he initiated a tradition which dominated Europe for almost a thousand years. By showing the inadequacy of reason, he pointed to the value of revelation. This attitude marks the medieval mind, which subordinated philosophy to religious truth.

### A NEW CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHY

In this manner Philo developed a new concept of philosophy. Philosophy, to him, was not merely a subject which can give us a knowledge of the universe and teach us the principles of morality. It was also a method by which we can understand the majesty and providence of God. It became the task of philosophy to bolster religion, to explain its riddles and its traditions. Philosophy thus performed the same function for the educated man that the *Torah* performed for the masses.

Philo tried to show the strength and perennial values of faith through allegory. Obviously, he thought, many parts of religion are not to be taken literally. As we have noted, the God of the Old Testament frequently appeared in a most human, and occasionally in a most unpleasant, light. Through the use of allegory, Philo tried to develop the *spiritual* meaning of the religious writings and in this way explain away their imperfections. He was quite certain that this allegorical interpretation would be of inestimable value. Not only would it deepen the faith, not only would it become more philosophical, but it would be more systematic and more coherent than ever before. Accordingly, the majesty, perfection, and power of God would be manifested not only to the masses but also to the philosophers.

Like the Stoics, Philo divided philosophy into three parts: (1) logic; (2) physics; (3) ethics. Under the last heading, however, he included theology, which marked his departure from the Stoic definition. According to Philo, philosophy deals not merely with human knowledge but also with the study of divine qualities. In fact, the study of science he considered to be only a prelude to metaphysical problems, which represent the climax and the acme of intellectual achievement.

### LIFE AND CHARACTER

We know almost as little of the life of Philo as of the Skeptic philosophers. He was born about 20 B.C. His father was a man of influence and wealth in the Hebrew congregation. He received every educational advantage and very early in his youth gained a full acquaintance with Greek philosophy. In his writings, he used a rather ornate style, a fact which probably indicates a very thorough instruction in rhetoric.

All his life Philo was attracted to contemplation and philosophic wisdom. He did not envy his brother, who occupied a high political position in the Roman administration of Egypt, for he yearned for a quiet life away from worldly success and worldly honors. His studies were rudely interrupted under emperor Caligula, who wanted to be worshiped as a god and who bore a dislike for the Hebrews. In 38 A.D. Alexandria witnessed pogroms; the peace of the city was broken by angry mobs who attacked the Hebraic population. Scenes of destruction and bloodshed were recorded by the ancient historians, whose tales remind us of the ravages in Nazi Germany. The emperor was determined to set up his image in the temple at Jerusalem. It appeared almost certain that an uprising of the Hebrews would take place.

It was in this atmosphere that the Hebrews of Alexandria sent an embassy headed by Philo to Rome. This honor indicates the high esteem in which he was held by his religious comrades. Later he published an account of the negotiations which demonstrates that he was not unacquainted with the ways of the world and could hold his own in diplomacy.

The Hebrew cause was aided when Caligula was assassinated and a new emperor, Claudius, took his place. Peace was restored in Alexandria and in Palestine. The Roman governor who had aided in the riots was punished for his crime. All this appeared as a sign of Providence to Philo, who felt that in this manner God's justice was vindicated. He died some time before 50 A.D.

The meager facts of Philo's life reveal a scholar occupied primarily with philosophical studies. His contemporaries were awed by his profound knowledge, and they noted with satisfaction that his wisdom had not decreased his respect for religion. Despite his training in Greek and Latin philosophy, he had no desire to accept the ways of the pagans. In fact, he looked down on their accomplishments, for he believed that much of their wisdom was borrowed from the Hebrews. *His spiritual guide was Moses, not Aristotle; his eyes were turned to Jerusalem, not to Athens.*

## THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

To appreciate Philo's concept of knowledge we must understand his classification of man into three types: those who are earth-born, those who are heaven-born, and those who are god-born.

"The earth-born are those who take the pleasures of the body for their quarry, who make it their practice to indulge in them and enjoy them and provide the means by which each of them may be promoted. The heaven-born are the votaries of the arts and of knowledge, the lovers of learning. For the heavenly element in us is the mind, as the heavenly beings are each of them a mind. And it is the mind which pursues the learning of the schools and the other arts one and all, which sharpens and whets itself, aye, and trains and drills itself solid in the contemplation of what is intelligible by mind. But the men of God are priests and prophets who have refused to accept membership in the commonwealth of the world and to become citizens therein, but have risen wholly above the sphere of sense-perception and have been translated into the world of the intelligible and dwell there registered as freemen of the commonwealth of Ideas, which are imperishable and incorporeal."<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge presents us with a ladder, Philo averred. We rise from the sensation of the bodily senses to the divine realm of inspiration. The highest form of knowledge, thus, is not reason; rather, prophecy. This concept shows how Philo differed from the Greek thinkers, who would not have accepted such a classification.

He made a definite distinction between sensation and reason. Sensation is concerned only with superficial phenomena; it is occupied with the tangible and visible realm. Reason, on the other hand, unifies knowledge and obtains a view of the essence of life. While sensation is concerned with corporeal things, reason gives us an understanding of *immaterial* realities.

Man's mind, Philo believed, is never independent of God. In this belief he contradicted Protagoras, who held man to be the measure of everything. Such a view Philo regarded as extremely arrogant. He declared it impossible to explain the order of the human mind without having recourse to divine Providence. Accordingly, we cannot think, indeed, we cannot even have sense experience without the aid of God. Philo appears to have foreshadowed the view of occasionalism, which likewise believes that our mental experience cannot be explained apart from the *direct* intervention of God.

How can God be known? How can we understand reality? Philo answered that this understanding is achieved mainly by the prophet. The prophet, he stated, not only contains the divine spirit within him but also legislates for man. Thus Philo accepted the prophetic miracles and did not regard the prophetic vision as abnormal or

<sup>5</sup> *On the giants*, 60-61 (Lewy, *Philo*, p. 36).

deranged. On the contrary, to him it was a sign of God's care for man and represented the *highest* state of knowledge. To reach God, it is necessary to abandon purely scientific knowledge. Everything that corrupts wisdom and takes us away from God is to be shunned.

Like the Stoics and Socrates, Philo believed in self-knowledge. He taught that it is useless to carry on investigations into the material universe.

"Accordingly Holy Writ addresses to the explorer of the facts of nature certain questions—"Why do you carry on investigations about the sun, as to whether it is a foot in diameter, whether it is larger than the whole earth, whether it is many times its size? And about the illuminations of the moon, whether it has a borrowed light, or whether it employs one entirely its own? And why do you search into the nature of the other heavenly bodies, or into their revolutions or the ways in which they affect each other and affect earthly things? And why, treading as you do on earth, do you leap over the clouds? And why do you say that you are able to lay hold of what is in the upper air, when you are rooted to the ground? Why do you venture to determine the indeterminate? And why are you so busy with what you ought to leave alone, the things above? And why do you extend even to the heavens your learned ingenuity? Why do you take up astronomy and pay such full and minute attention to the higher regions? Mark, my friend, not what is above and beyond your reach but what is close to yourself, or rather make yourself the object of your impartial scrutiny."<sup>6</sup>

Such self-knowledge is not an end in itself, Philo declared, for the more we know our innermost being the more we realize our inadequacy. We are filled with a sense approaching despair. We see the nothingness of all created beings. In this manner we understand that there must be a supreme being, a standard of all values, all goodness, all beauty, and all truth. Thus we have mystical strains in Philo's philosophy, for to him the end of knowledge was the achievement of intellectual emancipation. We have a paradox, for reason can only develop by understanding its own inadequacy.

"For what the reasoning faculty is in us, the sun is in the world, since both of them are light-bringers, one sending forth to the whole world the light which our senses perceive, the other shedding mental rays upon ourselves through the medium of apprehension. So while the radiance of the mind is still all around us, when it pours

<sup>6</sup> *On dreams* (*ibid.*, pp. 56-57).

as it were a noonday beam into the whole soul, we are self-contained, not possessed. But when it comes to its setting, naturally ecstasy and divine possession and madness fall upon us. For when the light of God shines, the human light sets; when the divine light sets, the human dawns and rises. This is what regularly befalls the fellowship of the prophets. The mind is evicted at the arrival of the divine Spirit, but when that departs the mind returns to its tenancy. Mortal and immortal may not share the same home. And therefore the setting of reason and the darkness which surround it produce ecstasy and inspired frenzy."<sup>7</sup>

According to Philo, mysticism cannot be achieved without a new life and a new adjustment. It demands emancipation from the senses and from all types of pleasures.

"Depart out of the earthly matter that encompasses thee; escape, man, from the foul prison-house thy body, with all thy might and main, and from the pleasures and lusts that act as its jailers. . . . Depart also out of sense-perception thy kin. For at present thou hast made a loan of thyself to each sense, and art become the property of others, a portion of the goods of those who have borrowed thee, and hast thrown away the good thing that was thine own. Yes, thou knowest, even though all men should hold their peace, how eyes draw thee, and ears, and the whole crowd of thine kinsfolk, towards what they themselves love. But if thou desire to recover the self that thou hast lent and to have thine own possession about thee, letting no portion of them be alienated and fall into other hands, thou shalt claim instead a happy life, enjoying in perpetuity the benefit and pleasure derived from good things not foreign to thee but thine own."<sup>8</sup>

The last stage of knowledge, Philo taught, is one of fullness; we are the recipients of divine grace. He compared it to a bright vision in which all things are seen in their unity. The prophet utters words which are not his own; in all his actions he is the interpreter of God and the messenger of the divine spirit.

It is important to notice that in Philo's theory of knowledge, revelation is superior to reason. The final state cannot be defined according to the categories of science; it can only be understood through religious experience. We cannot attain spiritual emancipation through quantitative knowledge; rather, we must be inspired by God and be the recipients of his grace.

<sup>7</sup> *Who is the heir* (*ibid.*, p. 75).

<sup>8</sup> *On the migration of Abraham*, 9-11 (*ibid.*, p. 72).

The nationalism of Philo is evident in his insistence on the fact that the Hebrews had the most adequate vision of God. Philosophers like Socrates, he knew, had a constant awareness of the divine qualities of the universe; but to Philo, Socrates definitely was inferior to Moses. It was the function of the Hebrew people to extend the message of God, to glorify his powers, and to extol his miracles. The function of the Greek mind, on the other hand, was merely to systematize knowledge and explain the universe in a rational manner. While the Hebrews, according to Philo, might be oppressed for the moment, their future would be a glorious one, for through them mankind would be redeemed.

### PROBLEMS OF METAPHYSICS

In turning to Philo's metaphysical system, we find that he believed in the existence and unity of God. Hence, his philosophy was theocentric: The starting point and end of all human investigation lead to God. Monotheism is an outstanding feature of his philosophy. With scorn he rejected the idea that there can be several gods and that polytheism can be a valid hypothesis for either religion or philosophy.

Not only was Philo certain of God's existence, but he affirmed God's providence. Thus he could not accept the Epicurean doctrine of absentee gods who are unconcerned with the universe. In Philo we find a constant insistence on the powers of God, who is not limited by material principles.

Like Plato, Philo explained the world according to immaterial principles. What is corporeal, he said, is inferior to immaterial things; and materialistic philosophy is utterly fallacious, for it explains the highest principles of life by its lowest constituents.

Throughout the philosophy of Philo we find a *teleological* emphasis. The concept of design plays a paramount role, and the lower parts of the universe are explained according to higher purposes. The realm of nature, accordingly, is subordinated to the realm of grace. Man is inferior to the angels, while the angels are inferior to God. In every way the universe of Philo represents a rational structure. All its elements have a part; all perform a definite function. Unlike the Stoics, Philo did not believe in a world conflagration. What exists will not be destroyed by God, for such an action would be inconsistent with his goodness.

Philo regarded atheism as the worst form of wickedness. Like the Christian philosophers who followed him, he tried to prove to all

that God exists. We achieve a knowledge of God, according to him, when we see the order of the universe and when we realize that it is not a self-existent entity.

"Who can look upon statues or paintings without thinking at once of a sculptor or painter? Who can see clothes or ships or houses without getting the idea of a weaver and a shipwright and a house-builder? And when one enters a well-ordered city in which the arrangements for civil life are very admirably managed, what else will he suppose but that this city is directed by good rulers? So then he who comes to the truly Great City, this world, and beholds hills and plains teeming with animals and plants, the rivers, spring-fed or winter torrents, streaming along, the seas with their expanses, the air with its happily tempered phases, the yearly seasons passing into each other, and then the sun and moon ruling the day and night, and the other heavenly bodies fixed or planetary and the whole firmament revolving in rhythmic order, must he not naturally or rather necessarily gain the conception of the Maker and Father and Ruler also? For none of the works of human art is self-made, and the highest art and knowledge is shown in this universe, so that surely it has been wrought by one of excellent knowledge and absolute perfection. In this way we have gained the conception of the existence of God."<sup>9</sup>

According to Philo, it is impossible to *know* the divine essence because it is beyond human reason. The search for God, however, is a quest which makes our life truly meaningful. "We have the testimony of those who have not taken a mere sip of philosophy but have feasted abundantly on its reasonings and conclusions. For with them the reason soars away from earth into the heights, travels through the upper air and accompanies the revolutions of the sun and moon and the whole heaven and in its desire to see all that is there finds its powers of sight blurred, for so pure and vast is the radiance that pours therefrom that the soul's eye is dizzied by the flashing of the rays. Yet it does not therefore faint-heartedly give up the task, but with purpose unsubdued, presses onwards to such contemplation as is possible, like the athlete who strives for the second prize since he has been disappointed of the first. Now second to the true vision stands conjecture and theorizing and all that can be brought into the category of reasonable probability. So then just as, though we do not know and cannot with certainty determine what each of the stars is in the purity of its essence, we eagerly persist in

<sup>9</sup> *The special laws*, I, 33-35 (*ibid.*, p. 59).



the search because our natural love of learning makes us delight in what seems probable, so too, though the clear vision of God as he really is is denied us, we ought not to relinquish the quest."<sup>10</sup>

In general, the arguments which Philo propounded for the existence of God were not original. He appealed to a first mover, to a first cause, and to the concept that the universe reveals definite purposes. He was careful to show that God is not material, as the Stoics believed, but spiritual. Being a mystic, he felt it possible to have a vision of God. In this manner the conclusions of reason were substantiated by the experiences of the prophets and of the saints.

It must be pointed out, however, Philo wrote, that God in his *essence* is unknowable. We cannot use human qualities, human attributes, and human traits in describing his essence; instead, God is transcendent, ineffable, and unknowable. It is important to notice how this view contrasts with the usual Greek concept of God, which invested him with human qualities and regarded him as being limited. In Philo's emphasis on the transcendence of God we have a change in philosophical speculation. Henceforth, the distance between man and God is widened. The early comradeship between man and divine beings is lost and is replaced by an unrelenting stress upon the majesty of God and the nothingness of man.

Philo did not go as far as most of the medieval thinkers. While he appreciated the power of God, he did not despair of man. He did not possess excessive humility. Certainly the chasm between man and God was not as great in Philo's thinking as in St. Augustine's.

To Philo the transcendence of God did not imply that he is inert. True, Philo conceded, God is beyond all moral qualities, beyond all sense experience, beyond all reason, beyond all scientific laws, but he is not like Aristotle's unmoved Mover. Rather, God is forever active, forever creative, and forever exercising his providence over man.

How does God rule the world? How can his transcendence be combined with a material universe? This is accomplished through the logos doctrine, one of Philo's notable contributions to philosophy. We have noticed this doctrine in Heraclitus and in the Stoics; but in Philo, above all, it has a definite metaphysical function.

The logos, which is eternal, is conceived by Philo in various ways: (1) as God's essence, (2) "as incorporeal being," (3) as immanent wisdom.<sup>11</sup> To some extent, there is confusion in the use of Philo's

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

term *logos*, for it exists as an immaterial essence in the mind of God, as a blueprint of the universe, and as an immanent quality in the world. Furthermore, besides universal Ideas which mediate between God and man, we find angels who likewise are the messengers of deity.

What is significant in this cosmic scheme of Philo was his demand for intermediaries. Hence, we have angels who serve as ambassadors between man and God. This concept almost leads to an indirect polytheism and again foreshadows the medieval view, which regarded the universe as being ruled not merely by God but by angels and saints who aid in the salvation of man.

In his cosmology Philo maintained that the world was created by God and that it is not eternal, as Aristotle had maintained. Furthermore, Philo thought, the cosmological thinkers were mistaken when they believed in a plurality of worlds. This is the only universe, he declared; it is indestructible and consequently cannot be erased by a world conflagration.

In his specific scientific views there is little originality: The world is constructed according to a sphere, with the earth as the center of the universe. It goes without saying that Philo rejected the Epicurean concept of the atoms. While he used natural laws in defense of his theories, he did not exclude miracles, which he viewed as symbols of the unlimited power of God.

In his belief in miracles, he revealed a pious strain. To him, all aspects of creation bespoke the immense powers of God. To doubt God's greatness, according to Philo, is mere foolishness. Anyone who keeps his eyes open, who observes nature, can understand the voice of God. Philo did not doubt for a moment that God uses supernatural phenomena to accomplish his purposes. Through supernatural phenomena God aided the Hebrews in Egypt, in Philo's opinion, and sustained them during the long years in the desert. Miracles, in short, are a vital proof of the providence of deity.

## GOD AND MAN

Philo in his philosophy stated that God is not limited by anything. "God fills all things; he contains but is not contained. To be everywhere and nowhere is his property and his alone. He is nowhere, because he himself created space and place coincidentally with material things, and it is against all right principle to say that the

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, p. 291.

Maker is contained in anything that he has made. He is everywhere, because he has made his powers extend through earth and water, air and heaven, and left no part of the universe without his presence, and uniting all with all has bound them fast with invisible bonds, that they should never be loosed. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

In God's sight we experience true tranquillity: "God, since his fullness is everywhere, is near us, and since his eye beholds us, since he is close beside us, let us refrain from evil-doing."<sup>13</sup>

The wise man, therefore, in Philo's philosophy, turns away from material things and concentrates on the achievement of salvation. The wicked man, on the other hand, is dominated by his senses and by the irrational part of his nature. Alienated from God, he is a serf to necessity and in bondage to his passions. In his struggle for righteousness man is aided by the angels, who mediate between the divine and the material world. Still, there are not only good angels but also fallen angels, who have lost the grace of God. With this idea a pronounced dualism enters Philo's metaphysical scheme.

The same dualism appears in the struggle between the rational and the irrational soul. According to Philo, the rational soul, which contains the principle of freedom, is not bound to the body but distinct from it. The souls of the righteous will be rewarded by immortality. Some will abide with the angels, others will be placed among the eternal Ideas, while a few will be favored by living in the presence of God.

What happens to the wicked and to those who have defied God? Philo maintained that they probably will experience complete oblivion. This fate he regarded as beneficial, for the wicked have defied the wishes of God. Their lives have been devoted to nothingness; hence, their destruction is a just punishment.

## SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

The theory of Philo was bolstered by his belief that the Hebrews were set apart from other nations and had a special destiny. He was confident that in the long run the Hebraic spirit would triumph.

"What our most holy prophet through all his regulations especially desires to create is unanimity, neighborliness, fellowship, reciprocity of feeling, whereby houses and cities and nations and countries and the whole human race may advance to supreme happiness. Hitherto, indeed, these things live only in our prayers, but they will,

<sup>12</sup> Philo, *The confusion of tongues*, 136-137 (Lewy, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28).

<sup>13</sup> *On the giants*, 47 (*ibid.*, p. 31).

I am convinced, become facts beyond all dispute, if God, even as he gives us the yearly fruits, grants that the virtues should bear abundantly."<sup>14</sup>

Philo's faith was based on belief in the *Messiah* who would establish a new age in which God would be universally worshiped. Then, the enemies of the Hebrews would be punished, and all would praise the genius of this people.

The ideal form of government for Philo was a theocracy, a government dominated by religion. His utopia was based on the Mosaic code, which he thought more perfect than the utopias of the pagan philosophers. He asserted that Hebrew law was revealed by God; thus it was infallible. This law was superior to all legislative statutes and to all philosophical concepts. It could never be abrogated, for it was a gift of God to man.

The new society, which he predicted, would be governed by justice and peace. Wars would cease, there would be no economic oppression. All nations, alike, would praise the majesty of God and rejoice in his goodness. In these ideas Philo's concept of history was quite optimistic, for mankind would be liberated from superstition and fear. Nations would not take up arms again; rather, they would all acknowledge spiritual ideals.

This concept of history is strikingly different from the one which usually prevailed in Greek philosophy. To most Greek thinkers, history represented a rise and decline of various nations and cultures. Many of the historians, like Thucydides, did not appeal to supernatural causes; rather, they had a naturalistic view of history and explained how social and economic circumstances determine the institutions of man.

This, however, was not the method of Philo. To him, history was guided by one fundamental thought: the providence of God. It had a definite beginning and a definite end. Thus, in Philo, we have the beginning of the medieval view of history which found its consummate expression in St. Augustine's *City of God*.

What, then, is the best state? Will it be democratic or aristocratic? Philo answered that it will contain a mixed constitution. Its distinguishing trait will be its regard for the divine law and its acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. God will become not merely the ruler of the physical universe but also the governor of the political affairs of man. Thus Philo's utopia almost anticipates the Calvinist ideal of government. Calvin, like Philo, believed in a theocracy with

<sup>14</sup> *On the virtues*, 119-120 (*ibid.*, p. 102).

God as ruler of the state. Philo, however, was less puritanical than Calvin, and he would scarcely have approved of coercion in spiritual matters.

### PHILO'S ETHICS

As in his religious theory, Philo in his ethical system marks a departure from the accepted Greek patterns of thinking. To Philo, the ethical life was not autonomous but a prelude to religion. Consequently, reason itself is not absolute, but inferior to faith. Worldly power is unstable, and fame and honor are extremely precarious. Wealth, likewise, he explained, is subject to capricious fortune. Faith, however, is in a different category. It truly ennobles man, widens his perspective, and enriches his spiritual life.

"Faith in God, then, is one sure and infallible good, consolation of life, plenitude of bright hopes, dearth of ills, harvest of goods, inacquaintance with misery, acquaintance with piety, heritage of happiness, all-round betterment of the soul which is firmly stayed on him who is the cause of all things and can do all things yet only wills the best. For, just as those who walk on a slippery road are tripped up and fall, while others on a dry highway tread without stumbling, so those who set the soul traveling along the path of the bodily and the external are but learning it to fall, so slippery and utterly insecure are all such things; while those who press onward to God along the doctrines of virtue walk straight upon a path which is safe and unshaken, so that we may say with all truth that belief in the former things is disbelief in God, and disbelief in them belief in God."<sup>15</sup>

Unlike many of the medieval scientists, Philo did not believe that faith leads to emotional depression, for it fills man with hope and trust. The faithful man is not touched by the vicissitudes of life; hardship does not undermine his joy.

"After faith comes the reward set aside for the victorious champion who gained his virtue through nature and without a struggle. That reward is joy. For his name was in our speech 'laughter,' but as the Hebrews call it, Isaac. Laughter is the outward and bodily sign of the unseen joy in the mind, and joy is in fact the best and noblest of the higher emotions. By it the soul is filled through and through with cheerfulness, rejoicing in the Father and Maker of all, rejoicing too in all his doings in which evil has no place, even though they do not conduce to its own pleasure, rejoicing because they are

<sup>15</sup> *On Abraham*, 268-269 (*ibid.*, p. 90).

done for good and serve to preserve all that exists. . . . He never knows gloom and depression; his days are passed in happy freedom from fears and grief; the hardships and squalor of life never touch him even in his dreams, because every spot in his soul is already tenanted by joy."<sup>16</sup>

The humanity of Philo is revealed in his view of wisdom. The man who truly understands the universe is not gloomy or pessimistic, he declares, nor is he subject to dark moods. Rather, his mind is serene and tranquil, and he is cheerful in his actions. Thus his life is a true testimony to the power of God.

On every side, however, man is beset by irrational desires. Above all, Philo warns us against the enjoyment of pleasures, which he regarded as enemies of man. If we are in danger of being overcome by sensuality, we should remember that the pleasures of the flesh are short-lived, and we should turn to the delights of the spirit, which are everlasting.

Above all, we must beware of hypocrisy. Being a keen observer, Philo described the contemporary institutions as dominated by insincere men. True justice could not be found in the law courts; true piety was seldom at home in the temples. And, in his opinion, true wisdom was seldom cherished by the teachers. The world treasures superficial things and worships success, but, Philo reminds us, the home of the philosopher is not the physical universe, but God. In God we live; apart from him we are nothing.

Besides hypocrisy, Philo warns us against having too much faith in the individual; man is not the measure of everything. If so, he would be the king of the universe. Rather, it is a sign of wisdom to understand our limitations and to see the source of all values, all goodness, and all truth. All forms of atheism are to be shunned as being not only superficial views but dangerous to the welfare of our souls.

How can we overcome temptations? How can we live a constructive and pious life? Philo recommends prayer particularly but, as has been shown, prayer is not to be based on fear. His religion does not establish spiritual slavery; rather, it points to man's emancipation. Together with prayer, he recommends the study of the laws. He felt that such a study ennobles the mind and leads us away from sensuality.

True knowledge, he affirms, can never be opposed to religion. Only a superficial understanding can lead us away from God. The

<sup>16</sup> *On rewards and punishments*, 31-35 (*ibid.*, pp. 90-91).

more we study the divine books, the more we contemplate the miracles of nature, the more we are led to religion.

The ultimate aim of life, Philo points out, is contemplation and mystical union. This goal, however, cannot be achieved by neglecting practical duties. Holiness does not begin with the life of the recluse. We can exhibit a pious and just spirit when we are fair in our business dealings and exercise moderation in our material desires. If we hold public office, we should not pay attention to social approval; rather, we should practice simplicity.

Before we enter upon the contemplative life, Philo advises us to perfect ourselves in the ordinary virtues. Otherwise the danger arises that we may choose it merely as an easy way out. Briefly, we must serve man first before we can serve God. In our relationships with others we can learn humility and faith and expand our desire to be charitable.

The contemplation which we seek can be found in two ways: first, alone in the wilderness, if we are able to withdraw from society and achieve a genuine perspective regarding life. This method, however, is not infallible, for we are still part of society and our heart is often disturbed by passions. Thus, a second method may be just as adequate, for we can find a measure of solitude even in society. Philo, for example, described how amidst a crowd he could contemplate spiritual truth. Physical conditions, then, do not matter greatly; what is of primary importance is our *relationship with God*.

To Philo asceticism represented a holy way of life. He admired the work of the Essenes, who, he thought, were models in their practical piety. In his description of the monastic life Philo almost anticipated the medieval ideal of sainthood. Certainly such an attitude would not have been appreciated by Aristotle, who believed in a secular existence based on the Golden Mean and on a rational appreciation of life.

In Philo, however, the tendency is to withdraw from life, to abandon this world as the source of illusion and evil. Yet escapism is not the dominant theme of his philosophy. He still had hope in the future, and he still believed in fulfilling the duties of practical life.

### PHILO'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Professor Wolfson, in his excellent study of Philo, showed that the latter has usually been neglected by historians of philosophy. Most of the time they dismiss him with a few paragraphs or a few vague

remarks about his system as marking the decline of Greek thought. In this way they not merely underrate his influence, which was considerable and extended to the Hebraic thinkers, the Neo-Platonists, the Christian theologians, and the Arab philosophers, but also overlook the importance of his *approach* to philosophy. Philo probably initiated a new method in the history of Western civilization, a method based on faith and revelation rather than systematized reason.

Philo's synthesis of religious and secular thinking marks the foundation of the medieval spirit. In him, Humanism is replaced by a theocentric perspective, and God becomes the standard for all of man's actions, thoughts, and ideals. His logos doctrine had significant reverberations in Christian theology. It indicated how a mediation could be accomplished between a transcendent God and man, who is part of two worlds, one material, the other spiritual.

Philo is significant, furthermore, for expressing religion in a concrete and tangible way. His religion was based on laws and revealed through prophecy, which to him represented the highest stage of knowledge. Miracles are not to be despised, he taught, for they strengthen faith and reveal God's incessant providence.

In Philo we have an emphasis on universalism, in fact, a Hebrew version of the world state which is to be based on the Mosaic laws. Unlike the Stoic world state, it is a *theocracy*, not a moral commonwealth. Still, the Stoic strains in Philo's thinking are quite evident. We might almost call his philosophy a Hebraic version of Stoicism. Unlike the Stoics, however, Philo believed in the immaterial structure of the universe. It is not virtue which is the goal of life, he declared; rather, the mystic vision through which man understands the unity of the universe and achieves a oneness with God.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe Philo's religious heritage.
2. What influences motivated his philosophy?
3. How did he express the spirit of Hebrew nationalism?
4. How did Philo justify his belief in the existence of God?
5. How did Philo describe the process of knowledge?
6. What are the main ethical concepts of his philosophy?
7. Describe Philo's mysticism.
8. What were the political aspects of his philosophy?
9. Why was Philo so influential in medieval philosophy?
10. Summarize Philo's contributions to philosophy.



# *THE DECLINE OF ROME AND THE ECLECTIC PHILOSOPHERS*

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## *THE LAST PERIOD OF ROME*

**A**fter Marcus Aurelius, the Roman empire disintegrated. Aurelius' son, Commodus, as we have seen, specialized in dissipation and shocked the Romans by his sadistic activities. When he was assassinated, a civil war broke out with the army becoming the decisive factor in Roman politics. In 193 A.D. Septimius Severus became emperor. He was an excellent soldier with some success in defeating the barbarians, but he had to depend too heavily on the army, which, in the long run, undermined the security of Rome.

When the descendants of Severus died, another period of chaos governed Rome. Murder of the emperors now became commonplace. Twenty were assassinated within a period of fifty years. Rome was faced not only by external foes, especially the Persians, but by constant civil strife. It looked, in the 3rd century A.D., as if Roman power definitely was exhausted.

The decline was temporarily arrested by Diocletian. He tried to create order out of chaos by measures which led to strong centrali-

zation and by a reorganization of the administrative functions of the empire. Diocletian used an enormous secret service through which he tried to supervise government officials and prevent corruption. He made it compulsory for his subjects to worship him as the son of God and adopted almost Oriental ways of despotism. The senate became merely a debating society with no actual powers. In 301 Diocletian issued an edict to control the price of goods; but the law could not be enforced, and he was unable to halt the permanent economic decline.

After the death of Diocletian, another period of civil war broke out. There were several claimants to the throne, all of whom hated one another bitterly. Finally, Constantine assumed control. He divided the empire into two parts and built a new capital in the East which he called *New Rome*, but which later was renamed Constantinople. At first the empire remained relatively unified, but under Theodosius the division became permanent. After 395, Eastern and Western Rome were governed as separate entities.

Constantine is also significant for the edict of toleration which he issued in 313. It gave legal status to Christianity.

In his economic measures he was even more extreme than Diocletian. He tried to establish complete absolutism by making it impossible for serfs to leave the land and by making the guilds hereditary organizations. He envisioned a completely stratified economy in which the son would follow in his father's profession and in which no one could get away from the social class to which he belonged.

Constantine tried to enforce tax collection by holding the members of the town councils responsible for the revenue of the empire. Naturally the council members, disliking this function, attempted to evade it. Despite all the laws, corruption and bribery could not be stopped. The administrative apparatus became progressively more inefficient, and it created thousands of bureaucrats who plundered the nation.

Constantly the danger of the barbarians was becoming more noticeable. Rome was sacked in 410 by Alaric. Its emperors were utterly impotent. An excellent example was Honorius, whose reign lasted from 395 to 423. He had no actual power and was forced to depend on mercenary soldiers, who were ready to fight for anyone who promised them plunder.

Rome was sacked again in 455 by the Vandals. Thereafter the emperor was usually selected by a German general. By 476 A.D.

the triumph of the barbarians became complete, and the Western Roman Empire ceased to function as an autonomous unit.

### *BASIC REASONS FOR THE FALL OF ROME*

To appreciate the decline of Rome we must understand the fundamental causes which led to its downfall. At the outset it must be remembered that the decline was not sudden or cataclysmic but took centuries. The seeds for the eventual downfall of Rome were laid as early as the time of the Gracchi brothers, who unsuccessfully had tried to reform the Roman land system (133 B.C.).

First of all, we must note various political factors. The central government constantly declined. There was no adequate method of constitutional succession. Unable to protect the frontiers, the emperors could give no real security to many of the provinces. Consequently there were independent states at the frontiers of the empire which were practically immune from the control of the central government. Another factor in the decline was the growth of militarism. The army became practically independent, and it was so powerful that it could make and unmake emperors. Its soldiers were frequently without discipline, and their looting and vandalism embittered the civilian population. Then, too, the influx of mercenaries and foreign elements destroyed its effectiveness. The generals, most of the time, were eager for political power and had little heart for actual warfare.

The loss of freedom on the part of the Roman citizen was becoming apparent after the time of Marcus Aurelius (121-180 A.D.). The senate ceased to function as an independent political institution, while the emperor became an Oriental despot.

The land system of Rome produced economic disintegration. Most of the farms were owned by a few rich landlords, and the small farmer could scarcely make a profit. Hence his condition became desperate; and to ward off starvation, he accepted serfdom. Many farmers who were unwilling to accept the dictates of the landlords tried to make a living in the cities, but ill fortune followed them there, too. Thus they were forced to live on the dole, and they contributed to the general economic disintegration.

It must not be forgotten that Rome exploited its provinces. It bled them to such an extent as to exhaust their economic resources. This robbery could be kept up in a period of growth; but when Rome declined, such wholesale exploitation accelerated the process

of destruction. In short, Rome did not develop a satisfactory system of foreign trade. It achieved better political than economic centralization; and when the barbarians became more successful in their invasions, this economic isolation increased and provided the foundation for medieval feudalism.

Rome also was experiencing the pangs of inflation. The prices of goods rose to such an extent that few could purchase the necessities of life. The laws which were issued to fix prices proved to be ineffective. Then, too, the debasement of the currency destroyed the confidence of the people in their monetary system. Money lost its value, and in its place there arose a barter economy which prevented satisfactory economic relations. The public officials in the 3rd and 4th centuries became notoriously corrupt. People who had money found it easy to bribe them and to exact special favors. However, the lower classes were suffering under a crushing burden, and they resented the exploitations of the bureaucracy.

In this period few outstanding leaders arose. Emperors such as Diocletian and Constantine were the exception rather than the rule. The civil wars undermined the confidence of the people in their political institutions. Patriotism was becoming almost extinct; practically everyone seemed to be out for his own private gain. Those leaders who ordinarily would have gone into government service now chose the army or became religious devotees. Public duties were neglected, for the government was regarded with suspicion and hatred by most Roman citizens.

Climatic factors also played a role in the decline of Rome. Soil exhaustion became a direct menace. As yet, no scientific techniques had been developed to prevent erosion and safeguard the fertility of the land. Add to all these factors the growing pressure of the barbarians, who found many willing collaborators within the Roman Empire, and you have a definite pattern explaining why Rome was doomed.

### *THE LOSS OF MORALE*

This decline of Rome was not merely economic and political; it was also spiritual. It has been the custom of ecclesiastical historians to speak about the immorality of Rome, but this factor has been greatly exaggerated. Certainly the Romans in the time of Augustus were not paragons of virtue; yet it was a period of splendor and magnificence. Instead of blaming immorality, we must look to the decline of *morale*. There was a lack of public spirit and unity. A gospel

of individualism which neglected the interests of the community came into dominance.

The old Roman religion, which supported the family system, became almost obsolete. It was replaced by Oriental cults, such as the worship of the Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris; the Phrygian Mother Goddess; the Greek Dionysus; and the Persian Mithra, who appealed especially to the Roman army. These deities were sometimes amalgamated, and it became the custom of many Romans to pray to several gods and to belong to a variety of sects. However, all these cults introduced new elements into Roman life. Stressing future existence, their exponents talked about purification and frequently established saviors to mediate between man and God.

To many Romans, Christianity was on the same level as the Oriental Mystery cults. The challenge of Christianity, however, proved to be irresistible. Persecutions could not stop the Christian wave which overwhelmed Roman civilization. Many educated Romans complained of the otherworldliness, the fanaticism, and the subversive attitude of the Christians. For example, Libanius wrote to emperor Julian about the Christian destruction of the temples, and he believed that this razing was done merely for private gain.

For a brief period Julian tried to revive paganism in order to re-establish the old religion. He attempted to give a philosophical explanation of the gods, since he considered Greek culture far superior to Christian ideals. In his letters he regarded Christianity as an outgrowth of the Hebraic spirit, which he viewed as inferior to paganism. Julian's main deity was the sun god, a faith which probably reveals the influence of Persian beliefs. Like Zoroaster, he believed that the sun is the lord of all life and dominates all of creation. At the same time he tried to infuse a more sublime morality into the pagan faith, as is indicated by one of the letters he wrote to the high priest of Galatia:

"The Hellenic religion does not yet prosper as I desire, and it is the fault of those who profess it; for the worship of the gods is on a splendid and magnificent scale, surpassing every prayer and every hope. May Adrasteia<sup>1</sup> pardon my words, for indeed no one, a little while ago, would have ventured even to pray for a change of such a sort or so complete within so short a time. Why, then, do we think that this is enough, why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase

<sup>1</sup> A goddess who governs fate.

atheism?<sup>2</sup> I believe that we ought really and truly to practice every one of these virtues. And it is not enough for you alone to practice them, but so must all the priests in Galatia, without exception. Either shame or persuade them into righteousness or else remove them from their priestly office, if they do not, together with their wives, children and servants, attend the worship of the gods but allow their servants or sons or wives to show impiety toward the gods and honor atheism more than piety. In the second place, admonish them that no priest may enter a theatre or drink in a tavern or control any craft or trade that is base and not respectable. Honor those who obey you, but those who disobey, expel from office. In every city establish frequent hostels in order that strangers may profit by our benevolence; I do not mean for our own people only, but for others also who are in need of money.”<sup>3</sup>

The work of Julian, however, was not successful; and in 392 Theodosius outlawed paganism:

“No official or dignitary of whatsoever class or rank among men, whether he be powerful by fortune of birth or humble in the condition of his family, shall in any place or in any city slay an innocent victim for sacrifice to senseless idols . . .

“But if any one in order to make a sacrifice dares to offer a victim or to consult the quivering entrails, let any man be free to accuse him and let him receive as one guilty of lese-majesty a fitting punishment for an example, even if he have sought nothing contrary to, or involving the welfare of, the authorities. For it is sufficiently a crime to wish to undo nature’s laws and to investigate what is forbidden; to lay bare secrets, to handle things prohibited, to look for the end of another’s prosperity or to predict another’s ruin. . . .

“But if any one has sought to make such a sacrifice in public temples or shrines or in buildings or in fields belonging to some one else—if it be proved that the place was used without the owner’s knowledge, he shall pay a fine of twenty-five pounds of gold; and the same penalty for the man who connives at this crime or who makes the sacrifice.

“This statute we wish to be observed by judges, defenders and curials of every city, so that offenses discovered by the latter may be reported to the courts and there punished by the former. But if they think anything may be concealed by favor or passed over by negligence, let them be subjected to judicial action; but if the

<sup>2</sup> By that he meant Christianity.

<sup>3</sup> Julian, *Epistulae*, XLIX.

former, being warned, postpone giving sentence and dissimulate, they shall be fined thirty pounds of gold, and members of their court shall be subjected to a like penalty."<sup>4</sup>

This ruling was made complete by Honorius, who inflicted harsh penalties upon pagan worship:

"The yearly income of the temples shall be cut off and shall be applied to help out the expenses of our most devoted soldiery.

"Any images wherever still standing in temples and fanes, which have received or are receiving religious rites of the pagans, shall be torn from their temples, since we know this has been decreed by laws frequently repeated.

"The temple buildings themselves, whether situated in cities or towns or without the walls, shall be appropriated for public purposes. Altars shall be destroyed in every place, and all temples shall be given over into our possession to be used for suitable purposes; the proprietors shall be forced to tear them down.

"In the more polluted places it shall not be permitted to hold a banquet or to celebrate any solemn service in honor of any sacrilegious rite whatsoever.

"Furthermore, we give the ecclesiastical power to the bishops of these places to prevent these very things.

"Moreover, we inflict a penalty of twenty pounds of gold upon judges and a like fine on their officials, if these orders are neglected through their carelessness."<sup>5</sup>

## DECLINE IN PHILOSOPHY

While a new adjustment which emphasized supernaturalism took place in religion, philosophic speculation lacked originality. Two cults, especially, were fighting for supremacy: the Neo-Pythagoreans and the Eclectic Platonists.

Among the Neo-Pythagoreans we find Figulus, Apollonius of Tyana, Moderatus of Gades, and Nicomachus of Gerasa. Of these, Apollonius was regarded as a miracle worker, and he was practically deified by his followers.

The Neo-Pythagoreans borrowed from various schools of philosophy, including Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and especially Pythagoreanism. They made much of the principle of number, which they regarded as the original design for the phenomenal

<sup>4</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, xvi, 10, 12 (Maude A. Huttman, *The establishment of Christianity and the proscription of paganism*, pp. 216-217).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi, 10, 19 (*ibid.*, p. 229).

world. They were conscious of the problem of evil, and thus they frequently believed in an evil world-soul.

The Neo-Pythagoreans contrasted the heavenly and the earthly sphere in the Aristotelian manner. They believed that the heavens are eternal while the earth is impermanent. Like the Stoics, they emphasized Providence and the perfection of the universe. In their philosophy, religion played a supreme role. Their teachers were regarded as inspired saints. Frequently notes of ascetism became apparent. Accordingly, they practiced abstinence from eating meat and were opposed to marriage. Following the ancient Pythagoreans, they established special societies in which goods were held in common. With such a philosophy, the Neo-Pythagoreans looked down on the multitude, whom they regarded as being corrupt. The life of the saint, on the other hand, they considered to be the most perfect achievement of man. It constituted their answer to the growing decay of society.

Among the Eclectic Platonists we find Eudorus of Alexandria, Thrasyllus, Plutarch, Maximus of Tyre, Albinus, Atticus, and Apuleius. The difference between the two schools is scarcely noticeable, except that this latter school made more of Plato than of Pythagoras. There was the same dualism between natural and spiritual principles. To the Platonic philosophy various concepts were added, and there was stress upon mediating deities between man and God.

In this connection, special notice should be taken of Plutarch. He represents the twilight of the ancient spirit. He still believed in political functions; he still had a concept of public duty. But the new spirit is evident in his writings, for he did not disregard divination and oracles, and he justified the popular belief in demons. Like Philo, he believed that God is transcendent; and he assumed that various deities mediate between man and God. To account for evil, he established a world-soul which tries to counteract the providence of God.

Maximus of Tyre sounds somewhat like a medieval Christian preacher. He believed in demons and asserted that it is the task of the soul to be emancipated from the body and to be reunited with its divine source. We must get away from physical lusts, he declared, and, instead, concentrate on God:

"How should a man understand God so long as he is agitated by a multitude of lusts and extravagant thoughts? As well might one in the clamor and confusion of a democracy think to hear the



voice of the law and the ruler! . . . For when the soul has fallen into this turmoil, and surrendered herself to be carried along by the irresistible wave, she must swim through a sea whence escape is indeed hard—unless Philosophy take pity on her and suggest her own reasonings, as Leucothea gave the veil to Odysseus. How then may a man swim safely through and see God? The whole indeed you will not see till he calls you to himself; and call you he will at no distant date. Wait for his call. Old age will come to you—the guide thither—and Death, about whom the coward laments, whose approach sets him trembling, but the lover of God bids Death welcome, and has good courage when he sees him come.”<sup>6</sup>

Maximus of Tyre defended image worship, whereby he thought religion could be aided:

“It is not that the Divine Being stands in any need of images or statues. It is poor humanity, because of its weakness and the distance dividing it from God, ‘as the heaven is high above the earth,’ which has contrived these things as symbols. People who have an exceptionally strong power of mental realization, who can lift their soul straight away to heaven and come into contact with God—such people, it may be, do not stand in any need of images. But such people are few amongst men. You never find a man in the mass with a realization of God and able to dispense with aids of this kind. It is as with the teaching of letters to children. Teachers have an ingenious way of drawing the letters faintly and guiding the child’s hand over them, till the mental realization required for the art of writing is acquired by practice. Just in the same way, it seems to me, the old law-givers invented images for mankind, as it were for a troop of children, symbols of the honor shown to the gods, a leading of men by the hand along the way to mental realization.”<sup>7</sup>

Numenius prepared the way for Neo-Platonism by his concept of triads. In his metaphysical scheme there are three main principles: a transcendent being; a creator who is responsible for the spiritual and phenomenal world; and the universe, which also occupies the status of divinity. In his system there is a dualism between two world-souls, one good and one evil. The same opposition is extended to the soul of man.

What is especially noteworthy in Numenius is his wide acquaintance with various religions. He showed tolerance for the beliefs of the Egyptians, the Hindus, and the Hebrews. He spoke respectfully

<sup>6</sup> Bevan, *Later Greek religion*, p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

of Moses. He tried to weave all the philosophies into a coherent whole; however, he did not succeed too well in this task.

In the system of Numenius the First God is transcendent and beyond creativity: "Indeed there is no necessity for the First God to make anything; nay, we ought to look upon the First God as the Father of the Maker. If, therefore, we were talking about the Maker, and said that because he was good from the beginning, he was bound to make the best possible universe, that would be to approach the argument in a way appropriate to the Being in question. If on the other hand it is not the Maker but the First God, about whom we speak, then the statement just made would be impious. Let no such thing ever pass our lips. I will go on to see whether by quest elsewhere we can capture the right argument.

"Before capturing the argument, however, let us make to ourselves a profession of our belief, such as no hearer could misunderstand: the First God engages in no works of any kind; he is the King: but the Maker-God governs, going right through the heavens. Through him is the sending forth to us of the Mind (Nous) that is in us; for the Mind is sent down by transmission to all those who are ordained to partake of it. And so long as this God has his face towards each one of us and looks at each one of us, so long our bodies live and act, the God taking care of them by the radiations of his influence; but when the God turns round to the contemplation of himself, then our bodies die, but the Mind goes on living, enjoying a life of bliss. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

To understand God, Numenius continued, we must get away from sensible things: "Of bodies we can get knowledge either by noting their resemblance to other similar things, or by the indications to be found in adjacent things. But of the God (*i.e.*, the First God) by no possibility can we get knowledge by anything adjacent to It or by anything like It. We need—nay, take this figure. Think of someone sitting on a high cliff and seeing, far out at sea, a fishing boat, one of those small skiffs, a single boat, alone, nothing else near it: by straining his eyes he can just see it at one moment; at another moment it is gone. So must a man go far away from sensible things to converse with the Good, alone with the Alone, where there is no other man, no other living things, nothing corporeal small or great; only a vast divine solitude, unutterable, indescribable. . . . But if anyone clings to sensible things, and imagines that the Good hovers over these, if he then lives sumptuously and thinks that he has met

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148–149.

with the Good, he is altogether astray. For in very truth the method of attaining That is no easy one, but one above merely human skill, and the best thing is to detach all interest from sensible things.”<sup>9</sup>

In this period of philosophy are the Hermetic writings, which belong to the latter part of the 3rd century and evidently originated in Egypt. They consist of eighteen tracts describing intermediary deities who shorten the distance between God and man. The universe of the Hermetic writings is peopled with a multitude of gods. Like the other philosophies, these writings urge that the sensible world be transcended if the soul is to regain its purity.

Somewhat earlier than the Hermetic writings are the Chaldean Oracles, which also contain an eclectic philosophy and affirm mysticism. In them, reason is subordinated to intuition, and the otherworldly emphasis is only too evident.

It can readily be seen that the philosophy of this period, generally, reflected the spirit of disintegration. Theoretical speculations declined in originality; superstition took firm roots in philosophic circles; and the ideal of reason was subordinated to the ascetic life and the search for salvation.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the economic reasons for the decline of Rome?
2. What role did Christianity play in the decline of Rome?
3. Describe the role of immorality in the fall of Rome.
4. What measures did Constantine and Diocletian take to prevent the collapse of Rome?
5. Why was the decline of Rome a gradual process?
6. What were the military reasons for the fall of Rome?
7. Explain the meaning of Neo-Pythagoreanism.
8. Compare the philosophical speculations at the end of the Roman Empire with the philosophy of the pre-Socratic period.
9. Why did religion play such an important role in philosophy during this period?

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

## NEO-PLATONISM

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### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLOTINUS

**B**efore ancient philosophy came to a close, a last Indian summer took place in the Neo-Platonic movement. Plotinus was its harbinger.<sup>1</sup> He undoubtedly ranks among the supreme metaphysicians of mankind. His influence on Christian theology, on the Renaissance, and on outstanding poets like Goethe and Emerson can scarcely be minimized.

Among the systems of cosmology, that of Plotinus ranks high, both in speculative depth and in imaginative insight. In many ways Plotinus represents the best strains of his age. In him we find an otherworldly orientation and a mystical impulse, and thus we see that his main endeavor was to obtain an insight into spiritual reality. While other philosophers were appealing to superstition, Plotinus presented a completely intellectual account of the universe. His mysticism was not based on revelation or on adherence to any definite dogmas; rather, it was the product of a systematized philos-

<sup>1</sup> On Plotinus, see Inge, *The philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vols.; Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists*; Whitby, *The wisdom of Plotinus*; Overstreet, *The dialectic of Plotinus*; Mehlis, *Plotin*; Bouillet, *Les Ennéades de Plotin*.

ophy which gave a coherent account of man's relationship to the cosmos.

### THE LIFE OF PLOTINUS

Plotinus was born *c.* 204 A.D. in Egypt. He received his early education at Alexandria, where he studied under Saccas, who was also the instructor of several Christian theologians. He followed the emperor Gordian when the latter undertook a war against the Persians, and he used this opportunity to become acquainted with the religious customs of the East. He is described as a man of saintly character and attractive personality.

When he was forty years old, Plotinus went to Rome, where he was acclaimed as the outstanding thinker of his time. He attracted not only professional philosophers but powerful politicians, and he gained the favor of the emperor. It was his desire to found a new utopia, based on Plato's *Republic*, which was to emphasize the ideals of religious mysticism. The emperor was interested in the scheme, but court intrigue prevented its success.

Plotinus did not write down his thoughts until he was well along in middle age. His pupil, Porphyry, arranged his fifty-four treatises into six sets of nine. Thus they are called *Enneads*, and they rank among the masterpieces of philosophical literature.

The First Ennead is concerned with ethical problems. It deals with such topics as the virtues, happiness, forms of Good, the problem of evil, and the withdrawal from life.

The Second Ennead is concerned with the physical universe. It discusses the stars, potentiality and actuality, circular movement, and quality and form. The last part contains a diatribe against the Gnostics.

The Third Ennead deals with the philosophical implications of Plotinus' world-view. Such topics are discussed as the problem of faith, Providence, eternity and time, and the constitution of nature.

The Fourth Ennead describes the nature and function of the soul. It also discusses the immortality of the soul and takes up the problem of sensation and memory.

The Fifth Ennead deals with the manifestations of the divine spirit. It explains the doctrine of Ideas of Plotinus and also contains a notable chapter on intellectual beauty.

The Sixth Ennead contains a variety of topics. Among them we find discussions of numbers, of free will, and of the kinds of real Being.

Porphry's *Life of Plotinus* indicates the high esteem in which Plotinus was held by the Romans. He describes the intense concentration of his master and exalts his gentleness. Plotinus was widely known for his charity; for example, he brought up many orphans to whom he taught the principles of philosophy. According to Porphyry, Plotinus died of a disease of the throat. His last words were, "I am striving to give back the Divine in myself to the Divine in the All."<sup>2</sup>

### PLOTINUS' METAPHYSICS

In many ways Plotinus leaned upon Platonic doctrines. Like Plato, he believed in a spiritual type of love. Furthermore, he accepted Platonic mysticism and the reality of the Ideas. But in Plotinus there are Ideas of particulars as well as of universals. The main difference between the two philosophers is shown in their points of emphasis. Plotinus lacked the *social interests* of Plato. He did not believe that mankind could be reformed through a philosopher-king; hence, he did not try to apply his metaphysical ideals to politics. He had far less interest in and understanding of mathematics than Plato, and his writings lack the poetry of the Greek philosopher.

In every way Plotinus was much more single-minded than Plato, whose philosophy contains a variety of viewpoints and whose intellectual outlook was extremely plastic. Plotinus, on the other hand, was more consistent; there was one central motive throughout his life—the belief that life on earth is essentially a descent from divine purity, and that the soul must regain its union with God.

The metaphysical system of Plotinus is characterized by the concept of transcendence. According to him, there are three realities: *the One, the Mind, and the Soul*. The One is like the God of Philo; it cannot be understood according to the categories of science. It is beyond existence, beyond truth, and beyond all values. If we try to define the One, we are bound to fail, for no intellectual predication is adequate when applied to it.

The One, Plotinus believed, is at the summit of all Being: "We may think of the One as a light before the light, an eternal irradiation resting upon the Intellectual; This, not identical with its source, is yet not so remote from It as to be less than Real-Being; It is the primal Knower. But the One, as transcending intellect, transcends knowing.

<sup>2</sup> Turnbull, *The essence of Plotinus*, p. 3.

"The One is, in truth, beyond all statement; whatever you say would limit It; the All-Transcending, transcending even the most august Mind, which alone of all things has true being, has no name. We can but try to indicate, if possible, something concerning It."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, we cannot express what it is in its essence. We know only that it is a principle which is beyond reason and mind and which is the author of all Being.

"Those who are divinely possessed and inspired have at least knowledge that they hold some greater thing within them though they cannot tell what it is; from the movements that stir them and the utterances that come from them they perceive the power, not themselves, that moves them; in the same way, it must be, we stand towards the Supreme, when we hold Divine Mind pure, knowing that this is the mind within, that which gives Being and all else of that order; but we know too that Other, know that it is none of these, but a nobler principle, fuller and greater; above reason, mind and feeling, conferring these powers, not to be confounded with them.

"The All-Transcendent, utterly void of multiplicity, is unity's self, independent of all else, That from which all the rest take their degree of unity in their standing, near or far, towards It. It is the great Beginning and the Beginning must be a really Existent One, wholly and truly One. All life belongs to It, Life brilliant and perfect. It is therefore more than self-sufficing, Author at once of Being and self-sufficiency."<sup>4</sup>

The One is not to be approached through sense experience, nor can it be understood through the intellect. We ought not to ask where it comes from, Plotinus averred, or where it goes. We can appreciate its greatness through a vision:

"Only by a leap can we reach to this One which is to be pure of all else, halting sharp in fear of slipping ever so little aside and impinging on the dual: for the One does not bear to be numbered with anything else; it is measure and not the measured. The First cannot be thought of as having definition and limit. It can be described only as transcending all things produced, transcending Being. To seek to throw a line about that illimitable Nature would be folly, and anyone thinking to do so cuts himself off from the most momentary approach to Its least vestige.

"As one wishing to contemplate the Intellectual Nature will lay aside all representations of the senses and so may see what tran-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

scends the realm of sense, so one wishing to contemplate what transcends the Intellectual attains by putting away all that is of the intellect, taught by the intellect, no doubt, that the Transcendent exists, but never seeking to define It. Its definition could not be 'the Indefinable,' for This is a Principle not to be conveyed by any sound; It can not be known on any hearing, but if at all, by vision."<sup>5</sup>

The second reality of Plotinus is called *Nous*, a term which is best interpreted by Mind. It is the image of the One and contains within it the Platonic Ideas. These Ideas, however, do not merely have an intellectual existence; they are the archetypes of individuals. The content of the *Nous* is completely unitary. To appreciate the divine spirit, we must use self-contemplation, for the soul is a microcosm of the divine mind.

Plotinus' third reality is the soul. As the architect of the phenomenal world, it contains a world-soul and a multitude of lesser souls. The world-soul can be seen in two aspects. It is the energy behind the world and at the same time forms the body of the universe. The human soul also has two parts—one intellectual, which is subject to reincarnation; and the other, irrational and part of the body.

The soul, however, is not dependent on matter, since matter is purely passive whereas the soul is active. Thus the soul is the essence of the material body.

According to Plotinus, the world of matter can also be interpreted in two ways. The corporeal part contains the principle of Non-being and is full of evil and limitation. It is far removed from the majesty and perfection of the One. This belief does not imply, however, that the visible world is to be disregarded and shunned, as the Gnostics thought.

"Yet we must not think the world of unhappy origin because there are many jarring notes in it. What image of the Intelligible Realm could be more beautiful than this world of ours? What globe more minutely perfect or more admirably ordered in its course? Or what other sun figuring the Divine Sphere than this sun we see?

"This universe is a life organized, effective, complex, all-comprehensive, displaying an unfathomable wisdom. How, then, can anyone say that it is not a clear image, beautifully formed, of the Intellectual Divinities? This earth of ours is full of varied life-forms and of immortal beings; to the very heavens it is crowded. And the

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.



stars moving in their ordered path, circling the universe, how can they be less than gods?"<sup>6</sup>

The universe itself is created by a process of emanation, Plotinus asserted. This creation, in itself, is a timeless process. It can best be compared with the light of the sun, which illuminates the world with its brightness. Darkness, therefore, is nothing positive; it merely indicates the absence of light and distance from the One. Throughout the process of emanation the One remains the same, changeless and eternal.

It must be emphasized that the One is beyond space and time, in Plotinus' philosophy. Time itself is an image of eternity. "To bring this cosmos into being, the Soul first laid aside its eternity and clothed itself with Time; this world of its fashioning it then gave over to be a servant of Time, setting all its progressions within the bounds of Time. Putting forth its energy in act after act, in a constant progress of novelty, the Soul produces succession. Time, then, is contained in differentiation of life; the ceaseless forward movement of life brings with it unending Time; and life, as it achieves its stages, constitutes past Time.

"It would be sound, then, to define Time as the life of the Soul in movement as it passes from one stage of experience to another. For Eternity is life in repose, unchanging, self-identical, always endlessly complete; and there is to be an image of Eternity—Time, such an image as this lower All presents of the Higher Sphere. Therefore over against this oneness without extent or interval there must be an image of oneness, a unity of succession; over against the whole in concentration there must be that which is to be a whole by stages never final. The lesser must always be working towards the increase of its being, and this will be its imitation of what is immediately complete, self-realized, endless, without stage."<sup>7</sup>

Time, Plotinus taught, must not be conceived as being apart from soul; rather, it is an inherent part of the soul. If it achieved its original unity, time would disappear, for it is connected with the sensible universe.

In the universe of Plotinus we find an emphasis on *oneness*. All things are connected and bound together by cosmic sympathy. The parts of creation accordingly are affected by this wholeness in the universe. There is no isolated fact; nothing occurs in a chaotic way.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

The scientific ideas of Plotinus were not very advanced. Subordinating science to his metaphysical interests, he maintained that the heavens are superior to the earth, for they are the resting place of the most sublime souls. He assumed that the stars are the abodes of gods; and he accepted the reality of demons, who live in the space between the earth and the stars.

In every way Plotinus was an enemy of naturalism. He objected to the Stoic view, which regarded the material principle as primary and held that God, himself, has a material form. Plotinus made a definite distinction between body and soul, and he was emphatic in his insistence that the soul cannot be interpreted according to the categories of the body. Any valid explanation, he asserted, must depend on the *higher* scale of values. What is sublime in nature, then, cannot be viewed according to natural facts; on the contrary, all natural facts must be interpreted according to their spiritual tendencies.

### PLOTINUS' CONCEPT OF THE SOUL

To understand the philosophy of Plotinus we must appreciate his concept of the soul. He made it clear that the soul is a divine force and the source of all Providence. It is incorrect to believe, he said, that the world-soul is scattered in the universe; rather, the universe is in the world-soul. Furthermore, it is impossible to divide the souls quantitatively, for all souls are one. The universe, in short, consists of an indivisible unit:

"That the soul of every individual is one we deduce from the fact that it is present entire at every point of the body—not some part of it here and another part there. Are we to hold similarly that your soul and mine are all one, and that in the universe the soul in all the several forms of life is one soul, an omnipresent identity?

"If the soul in me is a unity, why need that in the universe be otherwise, seeing that there is no longer question of bulk or body? And if that is one soul and yours and mine belong to it, then yours and mine must also be one."<sup>8</sup>

Plotinus appealed to moral reasons to portray the oneness of the soul: "Reflection tells us that we are in sympathetic relation to each other, suffering at the sight of others' pain, melted from our separate moulds, prone to forming friendships; and this can be due only to some unity among us. There is, then, nothing strange in the reduction of all souls to one.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

"Invoking the help of God, let us assert that the existence of many souls makes it certain that there must first be one from which the many rise. This one is competent to lend itself to all yet remain one, because while it penetrates all things it cannot itself be sundered; this is identity in variety, like a science with its various sections standing as a whole; while the portion selected for meeting a particular need is present actually and takes the lead, still the whole is in every part; the part invites the immediate interest, but its value consists in its approach to the whole."<sup>9</sup>

In Plotinus we also find a doctrine of reincarnation. Like Plato, he stressed the existence of the soul before birth and its immortality. Reincarnation, he held, is determined by our action in this life. The evil man is punished; a murderer is murdered; and the tyrant becomes a slave. What is the destination of the soul? Where does it go after leaving the body?

"The space open to the soul's resort is vast and diverse. No one can ever escape the suffering entailed by ill deeds done; the Divine Law is ineluctable, carrying bound up, as one with it, the fore-ordained execution of its doom. The sufferer, all unaware, is swept onward towards his due, hurried always by the restless driving of his errors, until at last, wearied out by that against which he struggled, he falls into his fit place and, by the vehemence of his self-will, is brought to the lot he never willed. The law decrees the intensity and the duration of the suffering, while it carries with it too the lifting of chastisement and the faculty of rising from those places (of pain)—all by power of the harmony that maintains the universal scheme.

"Souls, body-bound, are apt to body punishment; clean souls, no longer drawing to themselves at any point any vestige of body are, by their very being, outside the bodily sphere; There where Essence is, and true Being, and the Divine within the Divinity, among Those, within That, such a soul must be."<sup>10</sup>

Do we retain memory of our previous existence? Plotinus asserted that memory represents a lower category of existence, for it indicates multiplicity.

"The memory of friends, children, wife, country, the lower man retains with emotion, the authentic man passively. The loftier soul must desire to come to a happy forgetfulness of all that has reached it through the lower. The more urgent the intention towards the

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

Supreme, the more extensive will be the soul's forgetfulness, unless indeed when the entire living has, even here, been such that memory has nothing but the noblest to deal with.

"In this world itself, all is best when human interests and the memory of them have been put out of the way. It is not essential that everything should be laid up in the mind; the soul does not take into its deeper recesses such differences as do not meet any of its needs or serve any of its purposes. Above all, when the soul's Act is directed towards another order, it must utterly reject the memory of such things, things over and done with now, and not even taken into knowledge when they were present. In this sense we may truly say that the good soul is the forgetful."<sup>11</sup>

### ETHICAL AND ESTHETIC DOCTRINES

In his ethical doctrines Plotinus started with political virtues. While he asserted that it is necessary to fulfill the functions of citizenship, he in general was uninterested in political problems. Unlike his later followers, Plotinus did not believe strict asceticism is necessary; rather, he affirmed the importance of *contemplation*. Like Buddha, he searched for spiritual enlightenment.

In this connection he raised the problem of freedom. Freedom, he asserted, lies in our inner being. It cannot be traced to external things. The wicked man is a serf to his passions and thus lives in a state of slavery.

"Soul becomes free when, through Divine Mind, it strives unimpeded towards the Good; what it does in that spirit is its free act; Divine Mind is free in its own right. But the Good is the sole object of desire and That whereby the others are self-dispossessing. Thought insists upon distinguishing between what is subject to others and what is independent, bound under no allegiance, lord of its own act. This state of freedom belongs in the absolute degree to the Eternals in right of that eternity and to other beings in so far as without hindrance they possess or pursue the Good which, standing above them all, must manifestly be the only good which they can reasonably seek."<sup>12</sup>

In our search for spiritual emancipation, Plotinus declared, we must be moved by love. At first we love sensible things, but finally we come to appreciate the source of all love and thus turn to immaterial essences. Like Plato, Plotinus felt that love refers to a higher

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

level of existence and thus turns us away from transitory things and concentrates upon reality.

Beauty, said Plotinus, likewise has a spiritual significance; hence esthetics is intimately connected with our moral life. The essence of the beautiful lies not in harmony or symmetry; rather, the beautiful represents an intimation of divine perfection. There is an ascending scale of beauty, leading from the senses to the emotions and then to the immaterial structure of the universe.

"Beauty addresses itself chiefly to sight; but there is a beauty for the hearing too, for melodies and cadences are beautiful; and minds that lift themselves above the realm of sense to a higher order are aware of beauty in the conduct of life, in actions, in character, in the pursuits of the intellect; and there is the beauty of the virtues. What loftier beauty there may be yet, our argument will bring to light.

"What is it, then, that gives comeliness to material forms and draws the ear to the sweetness perceived in sounds? What is it that attracts the eyes of those to whom a beautiful object is presented, and calls them, lures them towards it, and fills them with joy at the sight? And what is the secret of the beauty there is in all that derives from Soul? Is there some one principle from which all take their grace? Finally, one or many, what would such a principle be?

"Undoubtedly this principle exists; it is something which the soul names as from an ancient knowledge and recognizing, welcomes it, enters into unison with it. The soul includes a faculty peculiarly addressed to Beauty, one incomparably sure in the appreciation of its own. So by the very truth of its nature, by its affiliation to the noblest existent in the hierarchy of Being—when it sees anything of that kin, or any trace of that kinship, it thrills with an immediate delight, takes its own to itself and thus stirs anew to the sense of its nature and of all its affinity."<sup>13</sup>

There was, thus, to Plotinus, a connection between the beauty on earth and the beauty of reality.

"We hold that all the loveliness of this world comes by communion in Ideal Form. All shapelessness whose kind admits of pattern and of form, as long as it remains outside of Reason and Idea, has not been entirely mastered by Reason, the matter not yielding at all points and in all respects to Ideal Form, is ugly by that very isolation from the Divine Thought. But where the Ideal Form has entered, it has grouped and co-ordinated what from a diversity of

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

parts was to become a unity; it has rallied confusion into co-operation; it has made the sum one harmonious coherence; for the Idea is a unity and what it moulds must come to unity as far as multiplicity may. And on what has thus been compacted to unity, Beauty enthrones itself, giving itself to the parts as to the sum.

"This, then, is how the material thing becomes beautiful—by communicating the thought that flows from the Divine."<sup>14</sup>

It can be seen that Plotinus had a more sublime concept of beauty than had Plato. Plato, we remember, regarded art merely as a second-rate copy of reality and banished artists from his ideal utopia.

The esthetic concepts of Plotinus are connected with his view regarding evil. Evil, Plotinus affirmed, has no metaphysical reality. The pessimist will say that life is a process of competition; everywhere he sees war and suffering. How can we deny the existence of evil?

"This devouring of kind by kind is necessary as the means to the transmutation of living things which could not keep form forever even though no other killed them; what grievance is it that when they must go their dispatch is so planned as to be serviceable to others? They are devoured only to return in some new form: the actor alters his make-up and enters in a new role; the actor, of course, was not really killed. If dying is but changing a body as the actor changes a costume, or even an exit from the body like the exit of the actor from the boards when he has never again to play a part, what is there so very dreadful in this transformation of living beings one into another? Surely it is much better so than if they had never existed; that way would mean the bleak quenching of life. As the plan holds, life is poured copiously throughout the universe producing an endless sequence of comeliness and shapeliness, a living pastime."<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, what we call evil really contributes to the perfection of the universe. "Now all life, even the least valuable, is an activity, and not a blind activity like that of a flame; even where there is not sensation the activity of life is no mere haphazard play of movement; any object in which life is present is at once enreasoned in the sense that the activity peculiar to life is formative, shaping as it moves. Life aims at pattern as does the pantomimic dancer with his set movements; the mime, in himself, represents life, and besides, his movements proceed in obedience to a pattern designed to symbolize life.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

"In the case of music, tones high and low are made consonant by Reason Principles which, being principles of harmony, meet in the unity of the absolute Harmony. Similarly in the universe, we find contraries, white and black, hot and cold, winged and wingless, reasoning and unreasoning; but all these elements are members of one living body, their sum total; the universe is a self-accordant entity, its members everywhere clashing, but the total being the manifestation of Reason."<sup>16</sup>

### THE RETURN TO UNITY

The goal of Plotinus' philosophy was the achievement of a mystical vision. First, it leads us to nature, in which we find Providence; then we turn to the world-soul. "We find that the contemplation pursued by this, the birth pangs set up by the knowledge it attains, its teeming fullness, have caused it, in itself become all object of vision, to produce another vision (that of the cosmos); it is just as a given science complete in itself produces a miniature science, its image, in the student who has [a knowledge of] all its divisions.

"The primal phase of the Soul, inhabitant of the Supreme and, by participation in the Supreme, filled and illuminated, remains unchangeably There; but a secondary phase goes forth ceaselessly as life streaming from Life; for energy runs through the universe and there is no extremity at which it dwindles out, but, travel far as it may, it never draws that first part of itself from the place whence the outgoing began. No limit exists either to contemplation or to its possible objects, and this explains how the Soul is universal; where can this thing fail to be, which is one identical thing in every soul? It is not confined within the bournes of magnitude."<sup>17</sup>

Then we turn to the Divine Mind. "In the advancing stages of contemplation rising from that in nature to that in Soul and thence again to that in Divine Mind, the object contemplated becomes progressively a more and more intimate possession of the contemplating beings, more and more one with them. Hence we may conclude that in Divine Mind itself there is complete identity of knower and known, no distinction existing between being and knowing, contemplation and its object constituting a living thing; a life, two inextricably one.

"This Being is limitless; in all the outflow from it there is no lessening either in its emanation, since this also is the entire universe,

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

nor in itself, the starting point, since it is no assemblage of parts [to be diminished by any outgo].

"In its character as life, as emanation, though, Divine Mind must of necessity derive from some other Being, from one that does not emanate but is the Principle of emanation, of life, of intellect and of the universe. That Source cannot be the All and must not be a plurality but the Source of plurality, since universally a begetting power is less complex than the begotten."<sup>18</sup>

The principle of reality we find in the One; this is our final destiny. "If we define It as the Good and wholly simple, we shall, no doubt, be telling the truth, but we shall not be giving any certain and lucid account of It. Our knowledge of everything else comes by way of intelligence; but this Entity transcends all of the intellectual nature; by what direct intuition, then, can It be brought within our grasp?

"The answer is that we can know It only in the degree of human faculty; we indicate It by virtue of what in ourselves is like It. For in us also there is something of that Being. Wherever you be you have only to range over against this omnipresent Being that in you which is capable of drawing from It and you have your share in It; imagine a voice sounding over a waste of land; wherever you be in that great space you have but to listen and you take the voice entire—entire, yet with a difference."<sup>19</sup>

In this way the soul reaches the principle of reality, according to Plotinus. In the ultimate state there is no separateness, no consciousness of time, space, and plurality; it even transcends all categories of personality. Such a state, however, is extremely rare; and Plotinus experienced it only a few times. Since philosophy cannot explain it adequately, he reasoned, and since we cannot give a complete account of it, we had better honor it by silence and the realization that the mystical experience transcends rational understanding.

### THE FOLLOWERS OF PLOTINUS

After Plotinus, the Neo-Platonic movement produced only a few outstanding philosophers. Among them we find Porphyry (c. 233–301), who, quite puritanical, castigated the sensual life. He believed in evil spirits and tried to give an allegorical account of Greek religion.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115. Plotinus compares the One to a river which has no source outside itself and yet nourishes all other streams.



In Porphyry's philosophy we find a theocentric perspective. In a letter to his wife he maintained, "Let every way of life, let every work and word, have God present as overseer and witness. And for all the good things we do let us give credit to God: but for all the bad things we do the blame is ours, in us who choose; God is blameless. For which reason, when we pray to God let our petitions be worthy of God. Let us ask of him those things only which we could not get from anyone else. Those things in which the initiative belongs to virtuous effort, let us pray that they may be ours, after the due effort has been made; the prayer of the indolent man is vain speech. Things which you cannot retain when you have got them, for such things do not pray to God: because no gift of God can be taken away, so that what you will not retain he will not give. Those things therefore which you will no longer need, when you are rid of the body, make no account of: the things on the other hand which you will still need when you are rid of it, these things seek by self-training, beseeching God to stand by you as Helper. Now you will not need then any of the things which fortune gives and fortune takes away again. Nor ought you to make request for anything before the proper time, but only when God reveals the right request as something which is there within you by natural instinct."<sup>20</sup>

We are to be conscious of God in all our actions, Porphyry asserted. Above all, we are to avoid impiety. "For a wise man honors God even when he is silent; but a foolish man pollutes the Divine, even when he prays and offers sacrifice. The wise man then alone is a priest, he alone loves God, he alone knows how to pray. He who trains himself in wisdom trains himself to know God, not always supplicating and sacrificing, but practicing piety towards God by his works. . . .

"No evil is done to a man by God, for the Divine can only be beneficent; a man does evil to himself, amongst other things, by his wrong opinion about God. He who neglects to tend the images of the gods is not so unholy as he who attaches to God the notions of the multitude. Do you take heed never to entertain an unworthy thought about God or about his blessedness or about his immortality."<sup>21</sup>

Iamblichus, who died about 330 A.D., stressed especially the supernatural outlook of Neo-Platonism. He described the hierarchy of

<sup>20</sup> Bevan, *Later Greek religion*, p. 211.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

supernatural beings, who occupied a rather minor place in early Neo-Platonism. His philosophy stimulated an interest in occult matters. To substantiate his faith in miracles, he borrowed from Oriental as well as Pythagorean sources. He thought disbelief a grievous sin, as can be seen from the following passage:

“‘Thou shalt not disbelieve any wonderful thing about the gods, or about the divine dogmas.’ This maxim sufficiently commands our reverence and indicates the transcendence of the gods, furnishing our way and reminding us that we must not judge of the Divine Power by comparing it with ourselves: it is likely enough that certain things should be impracticable and impossible for us who are in the body and have a beginning in birth and are perishable and ephemeral, subject to all manner of diseases, to limitations in bulk, to the gravity which carries us towards the center, to sleepiness and want and surfeit, to foolishness and weakness and obstruction of the soul, and all other such things. It is true we have, even so, many excellent endowments from nature, but we are nevertheless in every respect inferior to the gods: we have neither the same power which they have, nor a virtue comparable to theirs. This maxim then specially instils into us knowledge of the gods, knowledge that they can do everything. For this reason it admonishes us not to disbelieve anything about the gods.”<sup>22</sup>

Proclus surpassed Iamblichus in his metaphysical system. Like Socrates, he believed in self-knowledge as the source of all genuine philosophy. He was born in Constantinople but studied at Alexandria. As head of the school in Athens, he was considered one of the outstanding thinkers of his time. In his philosophy we find innumerable series of triads. In it the principles of Neo-Platonism are systematized and synthesized with other philosophies.

While Proclus believed in the existence of the Olympian gods, he accepted also other mediating deities. He thought that man could not be saved without faith; thus religion plays an important part in his philosophy.

Proclus was succeeded as head of the Neo-Platonic school in Athens by Marinus, who distinguished himself in mathematics and was an excellent commentator on Plato.

Damascius is known to us mainly through his work on *First Principles*. He tried to show that the world was derived from a primary Being, which he regarded as utterly incomprehensible. Even more strongly than Plotinus, he insisted upon the transcendence of reality.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219,

While he was skeptical in his technical philosophy, he accepted a variety of superstitions. In this, he reflected the tendencies of his age.

Simplicius, the student of Damascius, spent most of his time in commenting on Aristotle's work, which he interpreted in a Neo-Platonic manner. With him ancient philosophy comes to a close, and the age of faith fully triumphs over it.

The Christian believers looked with contempt upon the Neo-Platonic mode of thinking. To them, speculative philosophy was not merely a waste of time but also incompatible with salvation. This belief sometimes found expression in overt acts. For instance, in 415 A.D. Hypatia, a learned and scholarly woman, an expert in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, was killed by a mob in Alexandria. The final step was taken by emperor Justinian, who, in 529 A.D., issued an order prohibiting the teaching of philosophy at Athens.

Justinian's order signified the end of an age. Independent speculation, a detached consideration of the universe, objective knowledge—all these attitudes were henceforth abandoned. Instead of reason, faith now was supreme.

It must not be thought, however, that the influence of ancient philosophy was erased. Even during the Middle Ages ancient philosophy stimulated many of the noblest minds of Europe. It kept alive an ideal of life which was based on a secular and naturalistic perspective. When ancient philosophy in all its glory was rediscovered during the Renaissance, it laid the seeds for much of modern civilization. In many ways modern man is more closely associated with the spirit of Greek and Roman philosophy than with the faith of the medieval period.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Relate the major events in the life of Plotinus.
2. Compare the world-view of Plotinus with that of Plato.
3. Explain Plotinus' concept of the *One*.
4. What did Plotinus mean by the world-soul?
5. Explain the process of emanation, according to Plotinus.
6. How did Plotinus view the mechanistic concepts of science?
7. What role did intuition play in the system of Plotinus?
8. Who were the main successors to Plotinus, and what did they contribute to philosophy?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Neo-Platonism?
10. Why did faith replace reason at the end of ancient philosophy?

# FOUNDATIONS OF MEDIEVAL UNITY

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## THE REBELS

Now we turn back the clock to consider the development of Christian philosophy. While secular thinking disintegrated, Christian philosophy became more and more important and conquered Western civilization.

The fate of Christianity is symbolic of the life history of a revolution, for Christianity, at least in early times, was a veritable revolution in political, economic, and moral philosophy. It started as a rebellion against religious formalism and was supported by all those whose social status was inferior, who wanted a new world and a *new hope*. Thus, Christianity became a successor to the Spartacus rebellion (an insurrection of runaway slaves, 73-71 B.C.) and formed the climax to the reform movements of ancient times.

A revolution of this type does not succeed without martyrs. Their deaths have almost a sacramental value; and later, when the revolution succeeds, they become objects of popular veneration. In addition, Christianity had a coherent organization and definite doctrines. Furthermore, it was encouraged by the inner weakness of the oppo-

sition. The otherworldly philosophy of the Church had been anticipated by the growth of Mystery cults, and its negative attitude regarding wealth had been preceded by economic anarchy, inflation, and the growth of feudalism.

The Christian revolution, however, ended on a *conservative* note, and the utopia that had been expected was postponed until a distant and uncertain future. Instead of struggling with economic greed and exploitation, the Christian soldier conducted a vigorous warfare against the devil and the lusts of the flesh. Instead of adjusting himself to the problems of this life, he became an escapist and adopted a supernatural perspective.

### THE MEANING OF JESUS

The period in which Jesus Christ made his appearance had many similarities with the modern age. Palestine was a scene of a strong and persistent class struggle. It was a hotbed of nationalism; the Romans were hated with as much bitterness as the Germans were despised for their occupation of France during World War II. The religious parties in Palestine were represented by all shades of opinions from the conservative, literal-minded, and complacent Sadducees to the strict Pharisees, to the communistic Essenes. The other extreme was represented by those who followed the skepticism of the Roman conquerors. Most of the time the Romans looked down on the Jews, whom they regarded as superstitious in somewhat the same way as we look down on extreme religionists in American civilization. It is natural that in such a world the work of Jesus Christ was bound to be misunderstood. Just imagine what would have happened if, in 1943, a prophet had arisen in occupied France and, instead of talking about the devilishness of the Germans and urging armed resistance, had spoken of a new world order uniting the conquerors and the conquered, slaves and free men! The Jews of Jesus Christ's time wanted immediate relief instead of a gospel of love and compassion.

The simplicity of Jesus has been exaggerated, for he was really of a complex nature. True, he was not trained in Greek philosophy and he was not interested in scientific concepts, but his view of life was penetrating and his parables reveal an *unusual* depth of wisdom.

Wisdom can be exhibited in two ways. First, it can be shown as a well-defined, well-ordered metaphysical or scientific system, somewhat like that of Aristotle—a system which seems to be exceptionally profound because it taxes the mental capacities of even the

most intelligent student. But the second way of wisdom can be just as meaningful and as deep although it rests upon simplicity, upon a few generalizations. Its truth is so striking that it can be understood by a vast number of people. This is the way of Lao-tse and Jesus Christ.

The religion of Jesus represents a constant search for life's inner meaning. This search is not just emotional or spiritual or intellectual but involves a dedication of the whole man. Its goal is not a reward but even a greater doubt, and at its end are the cross and the eternal question of Christ: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" An even more meaningful translation of his query would be, "Why hast thou put me to shame?"

This question is disturbing to those who expect genuine religion to be a solid and unshakable affirmation. Affirmation is an illusion that we likewise find in philosophy, especially in Plato, who believed that the sensible world is merely a part of eternal Ideas. But life is not based upon stereotyped and preconceived Ideas, nor can we find anywhere an absolute road to perfection; rather, life is an unending maze, and man best finds himself by following faithfully the labyrinth and tunnel of confusion.

The paramount achievements of Jesus probably were his questions, not his answers. Only Buddha in India dared to ask such profound questions as Jesus asked, but his answers were negative, although Nirvana to a mystic means affirmation and fulfillment. The answers of Jesus were *defiantly positive*. Let there be tragedy in life, he taught, let there be suffering and death, yet man can triumph, for his spirit is invincible.

It must be made clear that Jesus' faith was far removed from the somber spirit of the Puritans. He is pictured as living with publicans and sinners. How different is this picture of Christ from that of Milton and Jonathan Edwards! Such a faith is not nationalistic but cosmopolitan; it is not the heritage of one people but of other nations as well, and it touches poor and rich alike. It was not entirely new in the world, for the prophets and Hillel (a rabbi born c. 70 B.C.) had anticipated it, but Jesus gave it its most complete and universal expression. The evils he attacked were economic exploitation, the nationalistic spirit, and the complacency of his time. These evils are just as real today as in his period.

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you."<sup>1</sup>

For most thinkers in modern times, Christ has lost his divine aspects. His name has become a formula for right living, although for some it is still the magic symbol of salvation. To the liberal the religion of Christ is the beginning, not the end, and its structure must be completed by the experiences of every generation. It has a *leitmotif* but no absolute rules and dogmas. The real Christ has been obscured by the emphasis placed upon his divine elements and by the mythology surrounding his resurrection and atonement. His humility has been veiled by the belief that he will come back as an awesome judge. His name has been invoked as a god of war in spite of his constant and emphatic stress upon peace.

In following the history of Christianity, we find that there was far more tragedy in Christ's relationship with his followers than in his own life experiences. Many of his followers understood only the negative and literal elements of his faith. They found the true religion in words and formulas, in abstract beliefs, and in orthodox philosophies, but in their lives a basically irreligious spirit prevailed.

## THE APOSTLE PAUL

It was the task of Paul to become the real apostle of Christianity. He converted Christianity to his own ideals, and thus the religion of Jesus was developed on almost the same spiritual level as other ancient cults. Many supernatural elements were introduced into Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> *Matthew* 5:1-12.

Paul had an excellent education at Tarsus, a prosperous university center. His writings indicate that he was familiar with Stoic philosophy and with other literary products of the Greek mind. He was well acquainted with Roman civilization, since his father was a Roman citizen, but basically he remained a Pharisee—fanatic, single-minded, and otherworldly. All the knowledge he had absorbed made him more suspicious of the pagan world and served only to increase his stress on *faith*.

Paul was a strange mixture of contradictory qualities. He was cruel, as his persecution of Stephen indicates, and his basic cruelty was never obliterated in spite of his later sacrifices for the faith. It was sublimated, however, and he found satisfaction in picturing the damnation of those who oppressed him. He still punished them, but it was by threat of divine torture.

It is possible that Paul suffered from epilepsy, a fact which may have heightened his nervous instability. As puritanical as Amos, he had a terrifying gift of invective; and at the end of the first epistle to the Corinthians he wrote, "A curse upon anyone who hath no love for the Lord."

The most famous scene in his life was his conversion on the road to Damascus. For three days afterwards, it is related, he could not see. One explanation for his dramatic conversion is that he was plagued by a guilt complex, his subconscious mind was rebelling and could be repressed no longer. Perhaps the death of Stephen convinced him that such a faith could not be conquered, or it may have been that he was exhausted by the long journey and the mid-day sun. At any rate, it was a cataclysmic experience as vivid as the baptism of Jesus by John.

Paul's major contribution to Christianity was his realization that this new religion could have an *international* appeal and should be based not upon the laws of Moses but upon the spirit of Christ. The essential element of Judaism had been strict observance of the ritual; to Paul the main factor was *faith*, and his view contributed to Christian unity.

This faith was not in a Messiah, but in Christ as the Son of God. Why had he been killed? To redeem the world, which was doomed by the sin of Adam. The faith of Paul was imbued with categorical formulas; it lacked philosophical detachment, but it appealed to the masses, to all those who wanted absolute assurance of deliverance.

This concept of faith, it goes without saying, was quite different from the classical ideal of reason. Faith, as Paul and later Augustine



and Luther interpreted it, involves a definite acceptance of divine commandments. It obliterates the independence of man and opens the door to a God-centered perspective.

Paul often spoke about divine grace, a term which has impregnated Western theology to such an extent that it has become commonplace. This concept of grace is mysterious and arbitrary. Again and again the theologians asked, "Do we merit God's grace?" "Are we really among the elect?" The grace of God seems to have become as unpredictable as the actions of an absolute monarch.

In his social philosophy Paul contributed a definite element of conservatism. Many Christians in his time were so sure the second coming was at hand that they would not work and neglected the ordinary duties of life. Slaves rebelled against their masters. Sometimes there were scenes of immorality, when initiation rites turned into drunken orgies.

Paul was uncompromising when it came to moral purity, but as to social ideals he was vague. Let the slave remain a slave! Let Christians follow the dictates of the emperor! Soon there would be a change, for Paul was certain of Christ's second coming.

"Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself; for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth it and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church. Nevertheless do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she fear her husband.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the

earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.

"Servants, be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that whatsoever good thing each one doeth, the same shall he receive again from the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, and forbear threatening: knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with him."<sup>2</sup>

### THE FAITHFUL AND THE SKEPTICS

As Christian theology was solidified after the death of Paul, the spirit of intolerance increased. Henceforth, Western civilization would be haunted by the fear that incorrect belief would lead to eternal damnation. All types of heresies developed. There were the Gnostics, who combined in their philosophy Oriental and Greek patterns of thinking. The Christian principles, thus, were subordinated to esoteric speculation. Among the Gnostics we find Carpocrates, Basilides, and Valentinus. The Gnostics were distinguished by their *anti-Jewish* spirit; hence they disregarded the Old Testament. They believed that the universe is dominated by a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. Evil they identified with material principles, with the heathen gods, and with the deity of the Old Testament. It could only be overcome, they thought, through Christ, who had released man from material bondage and restored him to primal purity.

What is significant in this philosophy is its opposition to nature and its attempt to divorce Christianity from the Hebraic background. The reaction against Gnosticism was so violent, especially on the part of Tertullian, that any type of pagan philosophy was regarded with distrust and was viewed as a handmaid of the devil. This distrust, however, never became as strong in the Eastern Roman Empire as in the Western. In fact, the philosophical depth of the Eastern Empire has hardly been surpassed in Western thinking.

Manichaeism divided the world into rival realms of darkness and light. Following Zoroastrian patterns, the Manichaeans preached

<sup>2</sup> *Ephesians* 5:22-33; 6:1-9.

that man should refrain from idolatry, sex, and sorcery. Mani, their prophet, considered woman to be the chief agent of the devil. Other heresies related to the moral living of the Christians. There arose the Montanists, who demanded a return to the austere ways of early Christianity and denounced marriage and worldly goods. Eager to be persecuted, they often gathered in churches where they let themselves be burnt to death.

The main controversy, however, related to the question of the Trinity. Arius, who is described as an austere and pious churchman, very much admired by the numerous virgins of Alexandria, said that Christ could not be co-eternal with God, for if God was created it must have been out of nothing. Christ, said Arius, could not be from the same substance as the Father. The heresy spread and reached the ears of the emperor, who, in 325 A.D., called the council of Nicaea. Three hundred and eighteen bishops assembled and discussed religious questions, and also attended sumptuous banquets. Athanasius made an eloquent plea before the assemblage, pointing out that if Christ had been created by God he could change and pass from goodness to wickedness. Moreover, he insisted, the Holy Ghost and Christ were of one substance, for otherwise Christianity would go back to pagan polytheism. The council agreed with Athanasius, but Arianism was not extinguished. Ferocious wars were fought over the issue.

Why is this council so important? First, it illustrates that doctrinal disputes were settled through political measures. Second, it shows that the question of the divinity of Christ was settled by executive decree. The majority decided what was right and imposed its will upon the minority. Third, it displayed little tolerance for those who disagreed with the prevailing opinions. They were regarded as enemies of the state and treated with great cruelty.

### *MEDIEVAL ETHICAL VALUES*

The modern reader will probably ask how this dogmatic spirit can be combined with the teachings of Christ, who emphasized above all peace and brotherly love. True, medieval Christianity both in its form and in its substance had little to do with the high idealism of Jesus Christ; its institutionalism contrasted strongly with the spontaneous, informal, and unorganized structure of primitive Christianity. We should remember, however, that medieval Christianity had become an international religion and had united within its theological and administrative system the most heterogeneous features. In

addition, it had to adjust itself to the crude ideals of the Teutonic nations.

Although otherworldly values and the desire for salvation remained dominant throughout the Middle Ages, medieval morality was not necessarily motivated by passivity. To be sure, the element of grace was emphasized, and of God's choice of the elect, but at the same time the doctrine of good works developed. Thus grace was subordinated in the popular mind to good works, which were thought to be the chief prerequisites for eternal beatitude. The temperament of the people demanded action and conceived of life as a struggle between good and evil, and light and darkness. It was not a solitary struggle but one in which the whole society participated, aided by the apostles, the martyrs, the saints, yes, the Blessed Virgin herself—who all assured man of reward for his virtuous endeavors.

Augustine, the most influential of the Church fathers, showed in *The city of God* that, since history began, this mighty battle has been going on between those who are proud and sinful, belonging to the abode of the devil, and those who are humble and virtuous, belonging to the abode of God. Consequently in medieval art there was a restless strain embodying the buoyant, explosive energies of the age, which contrasted so strongly with the Greek quest for a serene and balanced world-view.

The Greek ideal of life endeavored to grasp the fullness of man's existence. Knowledge, like beauty, was appreciated for its own sake, not for its aid in salvation. It was not so much depth of feeling as proportion and balance which counted; human nature was not thought of as having higher and lower parts but as a harmonious whole, in which the mean or the function of each capacity had to be found. Striving for self-control was in complete accordance with a humanistic conception of life. Most of all, stress was laid upon life on earth. What happened afterwards was not so important.

The medieval ideals, however, were based on the certainty of rewards to be obtained in a future life. It was a puritanical ethical system which the Church aimed to perpetuate. Like all authoritarian moral systems, it was negative rather than positive; it thwarted the natural drives of human nature; and it demanded perhaps too many sacrifices from the individual.

Strangely enough, the devil became an agent in effecting the unity of Christendom. What man did not fear the devil and the forces of evil in the Middle Ages? All that was foul and sinful in the world was assumed to be the work of Satan, who could appear in various

forms, perhaps disguised as an animal, as a child, as a beautiful woman, or as a saint. The fear of the devil and his cohorts kept many sinners from committing outrageous deeds. As the prince of darkness he delighted in attracting the souls of men to his abode. Here eternal pain, unhappiness, and disquietude awaited the sinner.

The medieval artists were probably most picturesque when they painted Satan. In the sermons of the priests, the devil and his temptations were portrayed more impressively than the pleasures of heaven. Dante was at his best when he descended into the Inferno.

The morality of the Church stressed at the same time that the pleasures of man are only transitory and that death is the greatest leveler. The idea that man is only a pilgrim and that the inequalities of human nature are only aspects of our earthly existence did much to increase the oneness of medieval society. Boethius in *The consolation of philosophy*, a favorite reading piece of the Middle Ages, summed up this feeling of the essential equality of man:

“He that to honor only seeks to mount  
And that his chiefest end doth count,  
Let him behold the largeness of the skies  
And on the strait earth cast his eyes;  
He will despise the glory of his name,  
Which cannot fill so small a frame.  
Why do proud men scorn that their necks should bear  
That yoke which every man must wear?  
Though fame through many nations fly along  
And should be blazed by every tongue,  
And houses shine with our forefathers’ stories,  
Yet Death condemns these stately glories,  
And, summoning both rich and poor to die,  
Makes the low equal with the high.”<sup>3</sup>

### THE INTELLECTUAL SPIRIT

The moral ideals of the Middle Ages, it is evident, did not lead to experimentation in natural sciences. Since God had created all things, plants, animals, even immaterial objects might harbor sacred verities; they also might confirm events paramount to the faith. All knowledge, including philosophy and history, was subjugated to Scriptural interpretation. Such knowledge was useful if it supported the theories of the Church and if it added to the understanding of revelation,

<sup>3</sup> Boethius, *The consolation of philosophy*, Bk. II, ch. VII.

but man could attain salvation without this background. What a valid knowledge of philosophy, history, and mathematics had accomplished in former times, theology was now called upon to achieve.

The absence of an exact knowledge of the physical world made possible the nearly universal belief in miracles. Miracles were symbols and signs of the providence of God. Saints, from St. Anthony to St. Francis, needed miracles for the maintenance of their rigorous way of life. And when the saints were dead, the masses of faithful but sluggish believers might profit by their sacrifices. Anything related to the development of the faith—a bone, a martyr's cross, the prominent proponents themselves—had an extraordinary saving power. Thousands would devour the current stories which told of visions, marvelous dreams, and recurrent healing wonders.

Among the erudite Christian scholars of the medieval world, few protested seriously against the cult of miracles and saint worship. Many events that had occurred in Biblical times were beyond the powers of rational understanding. With the advent of the new faith, the providence of God was expected to reveal itself again. "What is there among all the works of God," Augustine asked, "which would not be marvelous were it not cheapened by daily use?"

Miracles were symbols; moreover, the world, life itself, was an allegory. Men lived, feasted, repented, and died, but life was to have a spiritual meaning, and this meaning was *primary* for the medieval thinker, not secondary. To insist that this life is the only life was heresy, to concentrate the totality of one's efforts to ameliorate the world was inadmissible, to appreciate the beauty of the universe for its own sake was dangerous. These were characteristic modes of reasoning of the medieval mind.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Evaluate the life cycle of Christianity.
2. How did Jesus view the institutions of his time?
3. How did Jesus expand the concept of love?
4. What are the permanent values of the philosophy of Jesus?
5. Do you think mankind is ready to accept the ideals of Jesus?
6. What brought about the conversion of Paul?
7. Explain Paul's concept of faith.
8. How did Paul spread Christianity?
9. What are the main elements of the social philosophy of Paul?
10. What were the foundations of the medieval world-view?

## THE AGE OF AUGUSTINE

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### SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

**T**he Christian philosophy which dominated the Middle Ages owed a great deal to Greek and Roman patterns of thinking. This statement does not imply that Christian theology merely borrowed from earlier systems of thought; rather, it synthesized them and gave them a new meaning by its all-controlling emphasis on *supernaturalism*.

As we have seen, in the early days of Christianity, the doctrines of faith were relatively uncomplicated. Religion, then, was dominated by the expectation of Christ's early re-appearance. Thus, his followers were not interested in technical theological problems. But as Christianity expanded and as it was influenced by the Greek world, there arose a need for a definite formulation of the dogmas. A formulation was imperative, first, because many divergent opinions had arisen which tended to lead to disagreement and rebellion. Second, it was needed to meet the attack of pagan philosophers, who viewed Christianity as a superstitious faith and as being inferior to the old Greek philosophies. Third, a more concise intellectual statement of the Christian faith was required to appeal to the educated

classes. It was not sufficient to point out to them that Christ was the son of God and that all other religions were false compared to Christianity; rather, they needed intellectual arguments which could persuade them that the Christian faith represented the *only* road to certainty.

Among the sources of Christian philosophy we find Platonism, for Plato already had made a sharp distinction between the realm of the spirit and the realm of matter. He had protested against a relativistic view of morality and had shown in the *Laws* that the state must be governed by religious principles.

Even more direct was the influence of *Neo-Platonism* as championed by Plotinus. Such doctrines as the transcendence of God, the unreality of evil, the supremacy of the spirit, the insignificance of a purely scientific explanation of the universe—all these factors entered into the Christian world-view.

Besides Neo-Platonism, there was the impact of Aristotle. While in the early Middle Ages the influence of Aristotle was less marked than that of Plato, it later assumed a dominant position in medieval culture. What Aristotle transmitted to Christian philosophy was primarily a *method* through which intellectual arguments can be solved. Accordingly, Aristotelian logic became an almost infallible technique whereby the Scholastics tried to achieve certainty.

Morally, Christian theology owed a vast debt to Stoicism. Like the Stoics, many Christian theologians preached the supremacy of resignation and self-control and regarded the moral life as an end in itself. The logos doctrine of the Stoics had profound reverberations in Christian intellectual circles. Incidentally, the concept of the world state, guided by the providence of God, found a ready welcome in the minds of the Christian theologians, who, however, looked upon this state according to religious ideals and aspirations.

Besides the Greek and Roman influences, we must mention the Hebrew impact on Christian thinking. Philo, especially, influenced its development in the Middle Ages. His use of allegory, his concept of Providence, his doctrine of creation, his ethical ideals, his theocratic principles—all these views became part of the medieval heritage. The Hebraic influence also was manifested in the concept of sin which dominated the Middle Ages. As we have seen, this concept was almost absent in Greek philosophy, but in this epoch the view that man has strayed from the path of righteousness and consequently needs salvation became dominant.



## THE APOLOGISTS

The Hellenizing trend, which was already apparent in the Fourth Gospel, became strong in the Apologists. Among the outstanding representatives of this group we find Justin Martyr, Minucius Felix, and Lactantius. Most important of these men was Justin Martyr, who had studied the various philosophies of Greece. He related that he had absorbed the teachings of Stoicism, Aristotle, Pythagoras, and Plato. In none of these systems had he found complete certainty. Plato had prepared him for Christianity, in which he found the greatest meaning. Certainly Justin did not despise philosophy, which he combined with his religious ideals.

We must not, however, interpret the philosophy of Justin as a mere rationalization of Christian truth, for he believed in the supremacy of revelation and considered the essence of knowledge to be the understanding of God. Without the aid of God, he claimed, man is a frail being who is tortured by uncertainty and thus cannot find himself. But with God, through the teachings of Christ, man achieves his goal in the universe. To make his meaning clear, Justin used the *logos* doctrine. He identified Christ with the *Logos*. However, occasionally he employed the term in an impersonal sense as representing divine thoughts. Our reason, he felt, is derived from the divine *logos*; thus, the more we share in its perfection the more we grow intellectually. He explained the supremacy of Christ as consisting in his achievement of *total truth*.

Naturally, this theory represents a view divergent from early Christian philosophy. We notice how the explanation of Christ has changed. Instead of his personal traits and moral qualities, Justin emphasized his *metaphysical* perfection.

## CLEMENT

Important in the evolution of Christian theology was Clement, whose parents were pagans but who, himself, was converted to Christianity. Most of his work was done in Alexandria, where he attained fame as a teacher.

Among his works we find the *Protrepticus*, in which he attacked the pagan religions; the *Paedagogus*, in which he touched upon problems of education; and the *Stromateis*, in which he dealt with a variety of topics relating to ethics, philosophy, and religion.

Clement's ethical views lacked the severity which we find in later Christianity. While he denounced the theater and public amusements,

he did not insist upon asceticism. According to him, the moral life is not to be guided by excesses but by rational ideals. Salvation can be attained by all; it does not matter what social position a man holds. For marriage Clement had a high regard. He realized that celibacy frequently creates a multitude of temptations, all of which can be avoided through a wholesome family life.

Generally, Clement emphasized the inner motives of man. Thus, he felt that property in itself is not harmful but only too great a dependence on it. Our main goal, he reminds us, should be sharing worldly goods and using them for our salvation.

How then should we conduct ourselves? What should be our ideal of life? Clement almost reminds us of Stoicism in his belief in self-control. He contended that we should rise above emotions and in this way achieve complete independence. Still, he stressed the fact that the true Christian believes in love, for the love of God does not decrease independence; nor does it make us slaves to an arbitrary deity. On the contrary, it is the road to *true emancipation*.

Clement exhibited his love for philosophy by stating that if we love God we must try to understand him. Understanding God does not come through an irrational faith but necessitates the discipline of the mind. In short, said Clement, philosophy is an excellent preparation for the knowledge of God.

How did Clement conceive of God? Is God immanent or transcendent? Clement felt that God is beyond our rational knowledge and beyond spatial and temporal determination. The only adequate knowledge of him is negative knowledge. To say, then, that God is like man is to give a false concept of deity, whose essence surpasses human understanding.

According to Clement, the contact between man and God is achieved through the Logos. Through it God exercises his providence; through it the universe is created. Through it, also, man can understand God. In this application, the logos doctrine was helpful to Clement, who used it as a bridge between the world of matter and the world of the spirit.

### ORIGEN

Origen, a pupil of Clement, showed unusual intellectual promise in early youth. He was an outstanding scholar, not only in Christian literature but also in Greek philosophy. In his instruction he emphasized not merely metaphysics but also the physical and natural sciences.

Like Clement, he had a high regard for philosophy. Rational truths are not to be despised, he thought, and no Christian thinker can neglect the contributions of the Greek mind.

Origen defended the allegorical interpretation of the Bible, which rationalizes the inconsistencies of the faith. This interpretation is evident in his tractate *Against Celsus*. Celsus had claimed that the Christians were ashamed of their Bible and, therefore, resorted to allegory. In reply to Celsus, Origen stated:

"Now one might say to him, that if we must admit fables and fictions, whether written with a concealed meaning or with any other object, to be shameful narratives when taken in their literal acceptance, of what histories can this be said more truly than of the Grecian? In these histories, gods who are sons castrate the gods who are their fathers, and gods who are parents devour their own children. . . . But why should I enumerate these absurd stories of the Greeks regarding their gods, which are most shameful in themselves, even though invested with an allegorical meaning? . . . But we offer to the Creator a worship which is pure, and speak with religious respect of his noble works of creation, not contaminating even in word the things of God."<sup>1</sup>

To Origen, civic responsibility was inferior to religious dedication. ". . . We recognize in each state the existence of another national organization, founded by the Word of God, and we exhort those who are mighty in word and of blameless life to rule over Churches. Those who are ambitious of rule we reject; but we constrain those who, through excess of modesty, are not easily induced to take a public charge in the Church of God. And those who rule over us well are under the constraining influence of the great King, whom we believe to be the Son of God, God the Word. And if those who govern in the Church, and are called rulers of the divine nation—that is, the Church—rule well, they rule in accordance with the divine commands, and never suffer themselves to be led astray by worldly policy. And it is not for the purpose of escaping public duties that Christians decline public offices, but that they may reserve themselves for a diviner and more necessary service in the Church of God—for the salvation of men."<sup>2</sup>

Like Clement, Origen asserted the transcendence of God. We cannot know God's essence; we can only comprehend God through his works. The best way to reach God is through the revelation of

<sup>1</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, Bk. iv, ch. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. viii, ch. 75.

Jesus Christ, which Origen regarded as far superior to pagan philosophy.

Later theologians attacked Origen for his view that the universe is *eternal*. This view is different from the Biblical story, which upholds creation out of nothing. The reason for Origen's belief in the eternity of the universe was his feeling that otherwise God could not be regarded as all-powerful. In short, if the universe had not existed forever, there would be a difference between actuality and potentiality in the Divine Nature. Origen assumed, however, that God never changes and that God never contains any potentiality but is pure actuality.

The Platonic strains of Origen's philosophy are evident in his belief in the pre-existence of the human soul. Our station in this life, thus, is due to our actions in an earlier existence.

In this universe, he affirmed, we find a struggle between good and evil forces, and man's life is a battle ground. In his quest for salvation man is aided by good angels, while evil angels and the devil try to lead him into the path of wickedness. Final salvation consists in his reunion with God.

Important in Origen's philosophy is his faith in *freedom*. Unlike Augustine, he did not teach a doctrine of predestination. It depends on man as to the side he may choose, whether he wishes to ally himself with the forces of good or with those of evil.

Origen believed that frequently God chooses the sinner to promote the perfection of the universe. "However, lest any one should mistake my words, and find a pretense of wrongdoing, as if his wickedness were profitable to the world, or at least might be so, we have to say, that although God, who preserves the free-will of each individual, may make use of the evil of the wicked for the administration of the world, so disposing them as to conduce to the benefit of the whole; yet, notwithstanding, such an individual is deserving of censure, and as such has been appointed for a use, which is a subject of loathing to each separate individual, although of advantage to the whole community. It is as if one were to say that in the case of a city, a man who had committed certain crimes, and on account of these had been condemned to serve in public works that were useful to the community, did something that was of advantage to the entire city, while he himself was engaged in an abominable task, in which no one possessed of moderate understanding would wish to be engaged. Paul also, the apostle of Jesus, teaches us that even the very wicked will contribute to the good of the whole, while in

themselves they will be amongst the vile, but that the most virtuous men, too, will be of the greatest advantage to the world, and will therefore on that account occupy the noblest position.”<sup>3</sup>

The optimism of Origen is evident in his assertion that goodness will triumph in the end, that hellfire will not be eternal but will merely serve a disciplinary purpose. Accordingly, he believed in cosmic redemption through which virtue will prevail and evil will be destroyed.

### BYZANTINE THOUGHT

While the Eastern philosophers believed in reason and tried to give a systematic explanation of faith, those in the West were less interested in theoretical matters and, instead, affirmed the practical value of Christianity. As a consequence, the Byzantine Church looked down on Western intellectual standards.

The Byzantine Church was torn apart, especially by the problem of image worship. In 725 A.D., Leo III issued a notable edict prohibiting image worship. Rebellion broke out, and the empire was almost convulsed by civil war. In the West, Pope Gregory II violently protested against the edict. So strong was the resentment of the masses and the churchmen that finally, in 843, the edict was rescinded and image worship was restored.

The antagonism between the two churches could never be overcome. Ritualistic differences and the conversion of the Slavs brought about a complete break in 1054.

The Western church was influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite, a pseudonym for a very colorful thinker who applied Neo-Platonic terms to Christianity. Like Plotinus, he emphasized triadic constructions and taught a gospel of pantheism which made no distinction between the universe and God.

Important also was John of Damascus, whose main work was the *Fount of knowledge*. It is divided into three parts: the first deals with philosophy, the second with heresy, and the third with an outline of orthodox religion. Generally, the viewpoint of John of Damascus was anything but original; it was a synthesis of Christianity, Aristotelianism, and Neo-Platonism. He upheld the use of images in religious worship. Strongly opposed to the policy of Leo III, he showed that images enhance religion, making the work of religion more concrete and more tangible and strengthening the faith of the masses.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. iv, ch. 70.

The eclectic tendency of John of Damascus appears generally in Byzantine scholarship. Probably the outstanding scholar of the Byzantine empire was Michael Psellus (1018–1079). He was an enthusiastic Platonic scholar and asserted that philosophy could aid in creating a more rational statement of the Christian faith.

The main value of Byzantine philosophy was its preservation of Greek culture. Through translations and commentaries it stimulated the Western mind. It preserved the purity of the Greek language; and, after the capture of Constantinople by the Moslems, Byzantine scholars contributed to the rise of the Renaissance.

### WESTERN CHURCH FATHERS

In returning to the West, we notice that its Church fathers had a more absolute concept of power. This view had already been developed in the writings of Irenaeus. Especially concerned with the fall of man, Irenaeus stressed the power of the devil, who could only be thwarted through man's acceptance of Christian religion and through personal faith in Christ. According to Irenaeus, the death of Christ had important consequences. Not only did it prove Christ's obedience to God, but it released us from the bondage of Satan. In accepting Christ we must live righteously and uphold the Christian faith, which implies subordination to the Catholic Church.

Even more important than Irenaeus was Tertullian. In his works the legal aspects of Christianity are significant, but he lacked the speculative boldness of Clement and Origen. According to Tertullian, God is a personal ruler—almost a magnified Roman emperor. Obedience to God is man's great virtue. If we defy God's will, we become eligible for the tortures of hellfire, which, to Tertullian, were extremely real. Violently opposed to Greek philosophy, he declared that dogmas have to be accepted not on the basis of reason but on the basis of faith. They are not to be despised even when they appear to be absurd.<sup>4</sup> By faithfully accepting dogmas, man can indicate absolute adherence to God.

Tertullian ended his life as a Montanist and consequently was regarded as a heretic. Still, his influence on Christian philosophy was pronounced. More than any other thinker before Augustine, he stressed God's *absolute* power. Dogmas, he declared, must be accepted without questioning; and his picture of hell was terrifying in its literalness.

<sup>4</sup> Tertullian's famous statement was: *Credo quia absurdum*.

Cyprian, like Tertullian, had a significant place in early Christianity. He was bishop of Carthage and died a martyr's death in 258. Through him, special emphasis was placed on the unity of the Church. He declared that outside the Church no salvation could be found. In this pronouncement he fought against the heretical sects, who believed in freedom of opinion and were trying to go back to early Christian beliefs.

Cyprian's view of the continuity of the Catholic tradition, his insistence that the bishop owes his appointment not to man but to God, his struggle against the heretics—all these factors were reflected in the development of medieval Christianity.

The interests of Ambrose were just as practical as those of Cyprian. Ambrose was a real statesman of the Church, and it was partly through his inspiration that Augustine was converted. As bishop of Milan, he was in constant contact with the emperor, whom he tried to influence according to Christian principles.

Jerome, who was born *c.* 340, was more interested in literature than was Ambrose. He was well acquainted with Rome, where he studied rhetoric and enjoyed the pleasures of life. In his later years he became a hermit and praised the superiority of the monastic life. As the translator of the Bible (the Vulgate version), he made a notable contribution to Western civilization. But from the standpoint of philosophy, Jerome was far less significant than Augustine, to whom we now turn.

## AUGUSTINE'S LIFE

Of all the medieval philosophers, St. Augustine probably had the most spectacular career. He was born in 354, at Tagasta, of a Christian mother and a pagan father. In his *Confessions*, Augustine testifies to the virtue and piety of his mother, whose main desire was for her son to accept the principles of her faith. He was exposed to a rigorous education in his youth, and in his *Confessions* he relates his ordeals at school. He disliked, especially, the study of Greek, which was taught by a merciless schoolmaster who used physical punishment as his favorite method of instruction. He liked Latin literature, especially Cicero, whom he regarded as one of the great thinkers of all time.

When Augustine later studied at Carthage, he was overcome by the temptations of that city. For a time he devoted himself to worldly pleasures, but at an early age he became a professor of rhetoric. Later he taught at Rome, where he nearly starved because

his students would not pay him. He went to Milan, where, after being converted, he dedicated himself to the service of the Church. He lived in virtual retirement until 391, when he was made a presbyter. A few years later he became bishop of Hippo, a position which he held until his death in 430.

While the outward events of Augustine's life were not too spectacular, his spiritual pilgrimage deserves notice. In his early youth he was mainly interested in the study of literature, and he had little liking for philosophy. But after reading one of the books of Cicero, he realized that the study of literature is rather superficial and that the goal of all intellectual endeavor is the possession of philosophical wisdom. For the first time he began to ask searching questions relating to his destiny and his final goal in life.

Cicero's philosophy, however, was supplanted by Manichaeism as the main influence on Augustine, who was attracted to this philosophy because of its dualism, its rejection of Old Testament ideals, and its intellectual version of Christianity. He could accept this faith, for it was in accordance with his own philosophical outlook. On the other hand, he felt contempt for the ideals of his mother, who, he thought, represented the religion of the unlearned and ignorant.

Later, however, Augustine gave up Manichaeism because its followers pretended to know too much. His main disagreement was with their astrological views. He became a Skeptic, for he decided that the way of doubt represents real intellectual honesty. Yet even as a Skeptic, he did not challenge the existence of God and his providence; but he could find no assurance about the immortality of the soul and about man's ability to find an ultimate metaphysical truth.

Skepticism did not prove to be a lasting solution. It made Augustine doubtful and uncertain and filled him with anxiety and confusion. For a time he felt that life itself was completely black and had lost all its meaning.

He was saved from this intellectual chaos by Neo-Platonism, to which he was attracted by its insistence that the soul is immaterial and by its explanation of the unreality of evil. Neo-Platonism was a bridge which led him to Christianity, in which he found complete certainty.

It is no wonder that Augustine had such high regard for Plato, whom he esteemed as the greatest of all philosophers. Still, to him Plato was inferior to Christ, and Greek wisdom could not be com-



pared with Christian revelation. In his later years Augustine became the bitter foe of all heretics, and he thundered against their errors in his desire to preserve the unity of the Church.

### GOD AND MAN

Augustine's conversion produced a complete change in his intellectual outlook. Instead of reason and critical thinking, he placed main emphasis on faith; instead of man and his potentialities, he stressed the *sovereignty of God*. Throughout his philosophical system, he made it clear that apart from God there can be no reality. To be separated from God, he taught, means eternal damnation, a life of nothingness and oblivion; to find him leads to eternal bliss. But it is not enough merely to know God, according to Augustine. Intellectualism is not a pronounced feature of his system; rather, the most important feature is love for God. Religion, he stated, is primarily an emotional concern.

How do we know that God exists? How can we be sure there is such a principle of reality? Augustine showed little skepticism on this point. In our search for truth, beauty, and goodness we are guided by the concept that there is absolute truth, beauty, and goodness. In a word, relative standards indicate an absolute norm. This absolute norm, according to Augustine, has no meaning apart from the existence of God.

He used other arguments as well. For example, he pointed to the order of the universe, which implies a creator. He appealed to our conscience, which indicates a divine voice within us. He showed the physical universe as being contingent and thus necessitating a first cause. Like the Stoics, he asserted that everyone has a concept of God; accordingly, universal consent is used to bolster his belief in the existence of God.

Unlike the Manichaeans, Augustine did not believe in physical dualism. Consequently he affirmed that evil is not positive; it merely represents the distance from real Being. There can be only one God, he explained, who has all the attributes of perfection. As for the universe, it is created by God, and not eternal, as Origen had stated. It was designed on the basis of the divine Ideas; thus, the universe rests on a metaphysical model.

In his doctrine of knowledge, Augustine turned away from probability. We can never be guided, he tells us, by relative standards. In fact, if only probability exists, there can be no truth. There are two ways in which we can find eternal truth. One is through the

study of external things, in which we can find the majesty of God. The other is through self-contemplation, by which we can understand the divine force within us.

In some ways Augustine anticipated Descartes. Starting with his own existence, he explained why doubts verify belief:

"I know without all fantastical imagination that I am myself, that this I know and love. I fear not the academic arguments in these truths, that say, 'What if you err?' If I err, I am. For he that has no being cannot err: therefore mine error proves my being: which being so, how can I err in holding my being? for though I be one that may err, yet doubtless in that I know my being, I err not; and consequently, if I know that, I know my being: and loving these two, I adjoin this love as a third of equal esteem with the two. For I do not err in that I love, knowing the two things I love, without error: if they were false, it were true that I loved false things. For how could I be justly checked for loving of false things if it were false that I loved them? But seeing the things loved are true, and sure, how can the love of them be but true and sure? And there is no man that desires not to be, as there is none desires not to be happy: for how can he have happiness and have no being?"<sup>5</sup>

The road to philosophy, then, according to Augustine, lies in self-knowledge. "But since we treat of the nature of the mind, let us remove from our consideration all knowledge which is received from without, through the senses of the body; and attend more carefully to the position which we have laid down, that all minds know and are certain concerning themselves. For men certainly have doubted whether the power of living, of remembering, of understanding, of willing, of thinking, of knowing, of judging, be of air, or of fire, or of the brain, or of the blood, or of atoms, or besides the usual four elements of a fifth kind of body, I know not what; or whether the combining or tempering together of this our flesh itself has power to accomplish these things. And one has attempted to establish this, and another to establish that. Yet who ever doubts that he himself lives, and remembers, and understands, and wills, and thinks, and knows, and judges? Seeing that even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he doubts; if he doubts, he understands that he doubts; if he doubts, he wishes to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows that he does not know; if he doubts, he judges he ought not to assent rashly.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from *The city of God*, by St. Augustine, translated by John Healey, published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York. Bk. x, ch. 26.

Whosoever therefore doubts about anything else, ought not to doubt of all these things; which if they were not, he would not be able to doubt of anything."<sup>6</sup>

Since Augustine did not accept Skepticism, he was certain not only that the *self exists* but also that we can understand the *first* principles of metaphysics. Like Plato, he believed the task of man is to transcend the realm of phenomena, which is forever changing. Thus he made a clear distinction between sensation, which gives us only a partial view of the world and is concerned with the surface of things, and thought, which gives us an understanding of eternal truths. Yet thought is not the highest achievement of man, he maintained, for in the final stage of knowledge we experience *divine illumination* and thereby acquire a direct awareness of the majesty of God.

What should be our attitude regarding knowledge? Should we despise all pagan philosophy? Should we rely on mere faith? Augustine answered by saying that while belief is primary, it can be substantiated by rational knowledge. Reason cannot contradict the conclusions of faith, for both come from the same source—God. In fact, in the highest stage of knowledge, as we realize, all the sciences are inferior; and we must subordinate ourselves completely to the light of God, which illuminates our souls.

### AUGUSTINE'S THEORY OF THE SOUL

With special vigor Augustine attacked those who taught that the soul is material. In this way, his views marked a definite departure from Tertullian, who had asserted that the soul is corporeal. Augustine substantiated his belief in the immateriality of the soul by stating that the soul is everywhere in the body at the same time. If it were material, it would be bound to a certain place; only on the supposition that the soul is immaterial can we explain its action throughout the body.

According to Augustine, the soul has three fundamental activities: First, it is manifested through the memory; second, it possesses understanding; third, it contains the will. Therefore, the soul represents the cosmic Trinity. In fact, Augustine pointed out that by self-contemplation we can understand the truth of religious dogmas.

Unlike the Neo-Platonists, Augustine believed no world-soul exists, for every soul is unique and individual. He made a distinction

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, x, 10.

between man and animals by showing that the soul of animals is irrational, whereas reason characterizes man. The latter, however, is inferior to the angels, who possess an immortal body.

The soul, Augustine insisted, is immortal. Unlike Plato, however, he did not believe in its pre-existence nor did he accept the doctrine of reincarnation. The arguments which he used to establish the immortality of the soul are not original but are found in earlier Greek philosophy, especially in Plato. Augustine tried to show that the soul and reason are united. Reason, he assumed, is eternal; hence, the soul, likewise, cannot be touched by mortality. Furthermore, he felt, the soul as the principle of life is responsible for the functions of the body. When the body perishes, the soul remains untouched. He also justified his belief in the immortality of the soul by pointing to imperishable truths, which are contained in the soul and which guarantee its survival after death.

Augustine explained that the soul is *created* and does not emanate as the Neo-Platonists thought. Its position in the body is not the result of its fall; rather, it is natural for the soul to be in the body. While the soul of man cannot exist without its bodily surroundings, it is not entirely dependent on its physical environment and is *superior to the body*.

Significant for the development of medieval philosophy was Augustine's concept of matter. Occasionally he spoke of it in Aristotelian terms and emphasized the union between form and matter among created things. It must be remembered, he pointed out, that God does not contain any matter but is *pure actuality*. Augustine, however, also suggested that God has created in matter *seminal reasons* which are responsible for the existence of particular things.<sup>7</sup> In short, these seminal reasons are material germs which are copies of the divine creativity. This doctrine was utilized especially by Bonaventura, and it aroused much opposition on the part of Aquinas, who did not accept the existence of seminal reasons.

### MORALITY IN AUGUSTINE'S SYSTEM

The bulwark of Augustine's system of morality is Adam's sin, which, according to his thinking, has infected all of humanity. Originally, both Adam's spirit and his body were completely good, but through pride he gave up his divine heritage and fell from his innocence. The sin of Adam is expressed in man's sexual lust. Au-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Martin, *Saint Augustin*; Grandgeorge, *Saint Augustin et le Néoplatonisme*.

gustine was well aware of the pitfalls of physical temptation. In him, the ascetic temper triumphed; the celibate life thus appeared to him as the most perfect form of existence, and he looked with horror at sexual dissipation.

Being conscious of the soul of man, Augustine emphasized that without grace and without the aid of the Church man cannot be saved. Salvation is not due to human merit; rather, it is to be explained as an expression of *God's grace*.

Now we can understand the insistent opposition of Augustine to the doctrines of Pelagius. The latter, who upheld the supremacy of free will, was more humanistic than Augustine. Pelagius showed that man can achieve moral perfection without the intercession of the Church, and he refused to accept the doctrine of original sin. Augustine could not tolerate such a viewpoint. He realized that if it gained dominance, it would undermine the sacramental system of the Church and give man a false belief in his own independence apart from God. Thus, Augustine developed his famous doctrine of predestination. Human merits, he maintained, are not sufficient for salvation. God, from the beginning of creation, has elected some for salvation and others for hell. Those who are selected by God cannot resist, so strong and complete is his power. If God has chosen a man to be a saint, that man will persevere in a godly way of life. But, Augustine made it clear, we can never be completely certain of salvation. Thus we must not only depend on the sacraments but also constantly renew our faith.

The doctrine of predestination was not received with enthusiasm by the Church. It was attacked, first, because it makes free will almost an impossibility; and second, because it makes God extremely arbitrary. Augustine believed that in reality all men deserve damnation, but salvation for some is a sign of God's mercy. The number of elect in Augustine's view is equal to the number of fallen angels.

In the long run, Augustine's concept of predestination did not prevail in Catholicism, which made a compromise between his views and those of Pelagius. However, the Augustinian concept of predestination was resurrected by Calvin, who likewise was imbued by faith in divine determinism and by the feeling that only a few are eligible for salvation while most human beings are condemned to damnation.

Salvation, according to Augustine, is symbolized by faith. Faith in God means obedience to his laws and submission to his Church. Faith alone, however, is not sufficient; rather, it must be augmented

by a change in our way of life. Real faith, therefore, demands a *complete spiritual revolution*. The fundamental virtue, said Augustine, is love for God. All other affections and desires are secondary. For example, love for one's country is inferior to love for God.

It goes without saying that Augustine rejected the Stoic view of morality. Virtue, he averred, is not an end in itself; rather, it is a prelude to the possession of divine grace. He thus subordinated morality to religion. Nor could he accept the Stoic view that self-control and apathy are the highest Goods, for, he felt, the religious man will be full of emotion and will not restrain himself in his love for God. In other words, the ethical system of Augustine is anything but naturalistic. To be dominated by secular standards, then, is sinful. We must constantly remember, he asserted, that life on earth is a mere pilgrimage which serves as a preparation for our existence in the Beyond.

What, then, is the best attitude in morality? How can we be sure of living a virtuous life? Augustine recommends that we subdue the desires of our flesh and, if possible, choose the hermit's life. At any rate, we must abandon any type of hedonism. To discipline our body, fasting is necessary; the mind can be improved by frequent prayers. We are not to rely on material possessions; thus we are to be charitable to the poor and willingly give to the Church. It is especially important that we avoid any type of heresy, he continues, for acceptance of paganism or of the enemies of Christianity destroys the purity of our souls and brings about our damnation.

### THE CHURCH

Augustine's philosophy was bolstered by his faith in the *unity* of the Catholic Church. The Church, to him, was not merely an instrument of salvation; it represented the goal and the fulfillment of spiritual faith. He made it clear that outside of this Church, no salvation can be found. Within it, we are strong and can look forward to God's grace, but without it we are lost in utter spiritual darkness. The Catholic Church, he insisted, is not restricted to national boundaries, but its authority extends everywhere. In short, the bishop of Rome becomes the supreme ruler in Augustine's opinion. To evade his authority is an act of treason, contrary to the commandments of God. Thus Augustine paved the way for the institutionalization of the Christian faith. Following the ways of Christ is not sufficient, he claimed, for we cannot find ourselves without the Church, which alone can dispense the sacraments.

During this period the question arose, Are the sacraments valid even when the Church officials lead wicked lives? The Donatists claimed that the sacraments depend on the moral behavior of the clergy. Augustine, however, felt that the administration of the sacraments is independent of the moral standards of the priests, for the sacraments contain the symbol of God's grace. Through them man is able to achieve contact with the supernatural essence.

### SCIENCE IN AUGUSTINE'S SYSTEM

Since his interests were mainly religious, Augustine had little tolerance for the study of physical nature. In fact, he regarded the natural sciences with contempt and thought it a waste of time to study the laws of nature. For instance, he believed that astronomy does not advance the interests of man, for it tries to investigate the principles of the heavens, which man is not allowed to know. Toward anatomy, he felt even greater dislike. This study, he believed, detracts from the dignity of man and gives us a materialistic world-view.

Accepting the Bible as the source for his world-view, Augustine believed literally in the theory of creation as told in *Genesis* and refused to accept the heliocentric world-view. He maintained that the earth, the center of the universe, is spherical in shape.

Natural laws he regarded as inferior to divine laws. Miracles represent the providence of God, he averred, and indicate his infinite power. The universe of Augustine was peopled not only with men and angels but contained innumerable demons, who were the messengers of the devil. It was Augustine's habit to explain natural phenomena according to their supernatural meaning. In all things he saw the work of God, who to him was the principle of all explanation, all truth, and all certainty.

### THE CITY OF GOD

Perhaps the most influential work of Augustine, besides his *Confessions*, is *The city of God*. It was occasioned by the sacking of Rome by Alaric and his cohorts. This event had weighty consequences. Many Romans believed it was caused by their disobedience to the old gods and their acceptance of Christianity. They wondered whether they had chosen a false religion; many thus turned back to pagan practices. Others became openly skeptical, for they felt that the God whom the Christians worshiped had no power over the universe.

To answer these arguments Augustine wrote *The city of God*, which consists of twenty-two books. It required more than thirteen years to complete. It represents not merely a reply to the doubts of his age but a systematized philosophy of history which is of considerable interest to the 20th century.

Unlike most ancient thinkers, Augustine did not believe history to be a cyclical process; rather, he affirmed that all of history is guided by God. Hence, history has both a beginning and an end. Its beginning is the fall of man; its end is the victory of God over the forces of evil. It should be noticed that Augustine's philosophy of history is guided by a teleological world-view. History, thus, is not to be explained by an enumeration of economic, social, or political factors; rather, it is to be understood according to divine laws and divine providence. Furthermore, in Augustine's world-view, there is an eternal opposition between the forces of good and of evil. There can be no middle ground between saints and sinners, between the City of God and the City of the Devil. It remains for man to make a choice, for he cannot remain neutral. If he elects the City of the Devil, he may gain worldly power, expand his property, and enjoy the lusts of the flesh, but in the end he will be punished for his sins and suffer the consequences of his villainy. On the other hand, if he chooses the City of God, he may not be recognized on earth, may be persecuted, may be without material goods, and may never enjoy public acclaim, but in the end he will be rewarded for his perseverance and experience the glories of heaven.

Broadly speaking, *The city of God* can be divided into two main parts. The first, from Book 1 through Book 10, deals with the belief that paganism could have preserved the Roman Empire and that the Christian religion was responsible for its disintegration. The nature of Roman imperialism is clearly described. The Romans had never spared their subject populations. Had the Romans not destroyed Carthage? Had they not created terror among their enemies? Now they were being subjected to the same treatment by the barbarians.

Augustine compared the Gothic invasion to the Roman civil war. "What barbarousness of other foreign nations, what cruelty of strangers is comparable to this conquest of one of their citizens? What foe did Rome ever feel, more fatal, inhuman and outrageous? Whether in the irruptions first of the Gauls, and since of the Goths, or the inundations that Sulla, Marius, and other great Romans made with the blood of their own citizens, more horrible, or more detestable? The Gauls indeed killed the Senate, and spoiled all but



the Capitol, that was defended against them. But they notwithstanding sold the besieged their freedom for gold, whereas they might have extorted it from them by famine, though not by force. But as for the Goths, they spared so many of the Senate, that it was a marvel that they killed any. But Sulla, when as Marius was yet alive, sat on the very Capitol (which the Gauls entered not), to behold from thence, the slaughters which he commanded to be performed. And Marius, being but fled, to return with more power and fury, he, keeping still in the Capitol, deprived numbers of their lives and states, coloring all this villainy by the decrees of the Senate.”<sup>8</sup>

The second part of *The city of God* includes Book 11 through Book 22. In it he dealt with the origin of the two cities—the City of God and the City of the Devil—describing their progress and final end.

Augustine was especially picturesque when he depicted the tortures of hell. He did not agree with those who felt that the torments in hell should not be eternal.

“Now must I have a gentle disputation with certain tender hearts of our own religion, who think that God, who has justly doomed the condemned unto hell fire, will after a certain space, which his goodness shall think fit for the merit of each man’s guilt, deliver them from that torment. And of this opinion was Origen, in far more pitiful manner, for he held that the devils themselves after a set time expired, should be loosed from their torments, and become bright angels in heaven, as they were before. But this, and other of his opinions, chiefly that rotation and circumvolution of misery and bliss which he held that all mankind should run in, gave the Church cause to pronounce him *anathema*; seeing he had lost this seeming pity, by assigning a true misery, after a while, and a false bliss, unto the saints in heaven, where they (if they were true) could never be sure of remaining. But far otherwise is their tenderness of heart, which holds that this freedom out of hell shall only be extended unto the souls of the damned after a certain time appointed for every one, so that all at length shall come to be saints in heaven. But if this opinion be good and true, because it is merciful, why then the farther it extends, the better it is: so that it may as well include the freedom of the devils also, after a long continuance of time. Why then ends it with mankind only, and excludes them? nay but it dares go no farther, they dare not extend their pity unto the devil. But if any one does so, he goes beyond

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *The city of God*, Bk. iii, ch. 29.

them, and yet sins in erring more deformedly, and more perversely against the express word of God, though he thinks to show the more pity herein."<sup>9</sup>

While the inhabitants of the City of the Devil are punished for their insurrection, the members of the City of God will enjoy eternal bliss. "How great shall that felicity be, where there shall be no evil thing, where no good thing shall lie hidden, there we shall have leisure to utter forth the praises of God, which shall be all things in all! For what other thing is done, where we shall not rest with any slothfulness, nor labor for any want I know not. I am admonished also by the holy song, where I read, or hear, 'Blessed are they, O Lord, which dwell in Thy house, they shall praise Thee for ever and ever.' All the members and bowels of the incorruptible body, which we now see distributed to diverse uses of necessity, because then there shall not be that necessity, but a full, sure, secure, everlasting felicity, shall be advanced and go forward in the praises of God. For then all the numbers (of which I have already spoken) of the corporal harmony shall not lie hid, which now lie hid: being disposed inwardly and outwardly through all the members of the body, and with other things which shall be seen there, being great and wonderful; shall kindle the reasonable souls with delight of such a reasonable beauty to sound forth the praises of such a great and excellent workman."<sup>10</sup>

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUGUSTINE

It is almost impossible to do justice to the enormous influence of the bishop of Hippo. Not only did he lay the foundation for medieval thinking, not only did he adapt Platonism to Christian ideals, but he gave a systematic formulation of Christian philosophy which came to dominate both Catholicism and Protestantism. Thus Augustinian philosophy became the fountainhead of the Protestant reformers, especially of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Moreover, Augustine's social philosophy influenced the development of Western civilization. His condemnation of sex, his praise of asceticism, his view of original sin—all these factors conditioned the medieval world-view and found a ready response in Puritanism.

His philosophy of history exerted an influence not only on religious movements but on secular philosophies. In the struggle today between the various political ideologies, there is the same

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. xvii, ch. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. xviii, ch. 18.

confidence in absolute standards, the same dogmatism, and the same fanaticism. Thus, we have a conflict between irreconcilable ideologies, which are so convinced of the righteousness of their own cause that they will not accept a middle road.

The theocentric perspective of Augustine brought about a revolution in the outlook of Western man. Even today we are not emancipated from it. Despite the advances of modern science, despite the theories of naturalism, faith in God remains part of modern civilization.

Since the time of Augustine, Western man has become more and more introspective. This soul-searching attitude indicates how different he is from the ancient Greek, who believed in balance and moderation, and who usually despised introspection. With Augustine, *the self in its relationship to God becomes the supreme problem of philosophy.*

Modern philosophical movements such as Existentialism may disprove this concept of God but they still cannot get away from the problem of the individual. To some extent, the Existentialists are Augustinians without faith.

It is important to appreciate Augustine not only because of the answers he gave in so categorical a tone but because of the deep questions he raised. His world-view may seem antiquated in the 20th century; his questions, however, have a perennial vitality. We, too, are trying to find certainty; we, too, are attempting to find some kind of norm by which we can measure our actions. In short, it is our belief that the Augustinian approach to philosophy has a vital meaning for modern man. Augustine cannot be neglected, because he was one of the great influences responsible for the intellectual development of Western civilization.

### THE SPIRIT OF BOETHIUS

Boethius was one of the most attractive of all philosophers. *The consolation of philosophy*, one of the classics of mankind, has an immense attraction for the modern reader. He was born *c.* 480 A.D., the son of an aristocratic family. His father had occupied a high political office, and he, himself, attained the office of consul. Again and again he was aided by Theodoric, the Ostrogothic ruler. Boethius, like Marcus Aurelius, was proud of his family; his sons prospered in politics and became joint consuls in 522. Suddenly, in 524, Boethius' career came to a tragic end. Accused of conspiring against Theodoric, he was imprisoned. He knew that his end was

near. While in prison he wrote *The consolation of philosophy*, which was designed to comfort him amidst the most depressing circumstances.

Besides *The consolation of philosophy*, Boethius wrote other treatises which had a formidable influence on the Middle Ages. He wrote a manual on arithmetic when he was only twenty; he stimulated the study of music by his investigation into the laws of harmonics; and he wrote a treatise on geometry which indicates that he was thoroughly acquainted with Euclid. Furthermore he was interested in astronomy and physics, and he applied his studies to the improvement of the educational system of his time. He felt that arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy should be the basis of studies and hence became the founder of the quadrivium, which formed the substance of medieval education.

Boethius aided the development of technical philosophy by his translations and commentaries on Aristotelian logic, and he wrote a critical study on the philosophy of Cicero. He is believed, also, to have been the author of several theological tracts, but scholars have long debated their authenticity.<sup>11</sup>

Although Boethius was a brilliant scholar and had an excellent knowledge of Greek, he lacked originality in his speculations. His fame rests mainly on his commentaries and moral insight. He has been called the "first of the scholastic philosophers," indicating that he regarded philosophy as a prelude to religion and thought that the facts of this world are to be subordinated to the belief in a future existence.

In *The consolation of philosophy* we notice especially the influence of the Stoics, with their denial of the reality of evil. Like the Stoics, Boethius believed the main function of philosophy to lie in the realm of *ethics*. But we must not neglect the impact of Plato and Aristotle on Boethius, who all his life was interested in these two Greek philosophers. In fact, it was his ambition to indicate the essential similarity of the Platonic and Aristotelian systems. Neo-Platonism also entered into the philosophy of Boethius, for he interpreted Plato in a religious and mystical manner. Like Plotinus, he was intent upon finding the unity and oneness of the universe.

The whole structure of *The consolation of philosophy* was motivated by Boethius' ceaseless effort to see human life in a broad perspective, detached from the successes and miseries of human existence.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hildebrand, *Boethius und seine Stellung zum Christentum*; Stewart and Rand, *Boethius*, Introduction, pp. x-xi.

As a profound thinker, he was not satisfied with appearances and superficialities. This last work starts with some simple observations on the evils of existence and gradually becomes more involved and more intricate. It begins with his own personal welfare and ends with God. Thus Boethius traveled from the microcosm to the macrocosm. Finally, he was healed of his doubts, since he grasped the rational nature of the universe and saw himself guided by the ways of Providence.

Boethius believed that God rules by the use of *Providence and Fate*. Providence is distinguished from Fate by being the supreme intelligence which controls everything belonging to the eternal world, while Fate constitutes the method according to which the divine plan is realized in time and space. Nothing can exist and develop outside the control of Providence; Fate, itself, is subordinated to it, wrote Boethius. However, the unity which characterizes Providence is absent in the workings of Fate; this lack of unity results in moral confusion. God sees from "his high turret of Providence" all that is most appropriate and beneficial for the individual's welfare. He is like a physician who recognizes the causes of all sickness. Only God knows how to cure them; only his judgment is reliable and unailing.

In the last two books of *The consolation of philosophy* Boethius celebrated the majesty of God. To be guided by God is *true freedom*, he declared; to turn away from him entails misery and oblivion. When we realize his power, when we become conscious of his goodness, human sufferings appear to be trivial and are transcended by the knowledge that the good man will be triumphant, while the evil man will be punished for his sins.

Boethius showed at the end of *The consolation of philosophy* how freedom and determinism can be reconciled: "Wherefore doubtless all those things come to pass which God foreknoweth shall come, but some of them proceed from free-will, which though they come to pass, yet do not, by coming into being, lose, since before they came to pass, they might also not have happened. But what importeth it that they are not necessary, since that by reason of the condition of the divine knowledge they come to pass in all respects as if they were necessary? It hath the same import as those things which I proposed a little before—the sun rising and the man going. While they are in doing, they cannot choose but be in doing; yet one of them was necessarily to be before it was, and the other not. Likewise those things which God hath present, will have doubtless

a being, but some of them proceed from the necessity of things, others from the power of the doers. And therefore we said not without cause that these, if they be referred to God's knowledge, are necessary; and if they be considered by themselves, they are free from the bonds of necessity."<sup>11</sup>

In God's mind the past, present, and future are united, according to Boethius. He sees and knows all things, but this does not destroy man's freedom. "For this force of the divine knowledge comprehending all things with a present notion appointeth to everything its measure and receiveth nothing from ensuing accidents. All which being so, the free-will of mortal men remaineth unviolated, neither are the laws unjust which propose punishments and rewards to our wills, which are free from all necessity. There remaineth also a beholder of all things which is God, who foreseeth all things, and the eternity of his vision, which is always present, concurreth with the future quality of our actions, distributing rewards to the good and punishments to the evil. Neither do we in vain put our hope in God or pray to him; for if we do this well and as we ought, we shall not lose our labor or be without effect. Wherefore fly vices, embrace virtues, possess your minds with worthy hopes, offer up humble prayers to your highest Prince. There is, if you will not dissemble, a great necessity of doing well imposed upon you, since you live in the sight of your Judge, who beholdeth all things."<sup>12</sup>

### THE DARK AGES

After Boethius, European learning experienced a profound depression. The decline of Latin culture, the growing materialism of religion, the rise of feudalism, the constant invasions, the new supernaturalism—all these factors produced intellectual sterility. A few men stand out: Cassiodorus, a younger contemporary of Boethius; Isidore of Seville, an industrious encyclopedist; and Bede, the author of the *Ecclesiastical history of the English nation*. All of them were interested in theology rather than in philosophy and were dogmatic defenders of the Christian faith.

Isidore of Seville is perhaps the best representative of this age. His writings cover a variety of topics. He wrote commentaries on the Bible, explained Christian theology, systematized the ritual and ecclesiastical regulations, and, incidentally, attacked the Jews in a treatise *De fide Catholica contra Judaeos*. He also wrote on the

<sup>11</sup> Boethius, *The consolation of philosophy*, Bk. v, ch. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

regulations of the monks and tried to define the meaning of Christian piety. Furthermore, he devoted himself to historical studies, especially to the history of the saints. He made a brief excursion into the field of physical science, but his treatment of it was extremely superstitious.

The same spirit prevails in his twenty books of *Etymologies*, which were to be an encyclopedia of secular and divine knowledge. In the twenty books we find no systematic organization. In them Isidore of Seville discussed such topics as medicine, the derivation of Latin words, the books of the Bible, trees and herbs, the art of warfare, and a host of other subjects. Throughout this work he relied mostly on second-hand accounts and gave supernatural rather than scientific explanations.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What contributions did Origen make to philosophy?
2. Why is Clement important in Christian philosophy?
3. Relate the philosophical pilgrimage of Augustine.
4. Describe the Augustinian concept of God.
5. Why did Augustine believe in predestination?
6. What was Augustine's attitude towards sex?
7. What was Augustine's philosophy of history?
8. Why was Augustine preoccupied with the problem of evil?
9. What are the weaknesses in Augustine's philosophy?
10. How did Boethius experience the instability of life?
11. Describe the intellectual interests of Boethius.
12. What is the final conclusion of Boethius' philosophy?

## THE REBIRTH OF PHILOSOPHY

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### CHARLEMAGNE AND CULTURE

With the ascendancy of the Frankish power, the Germans became the defenders of Rome and the protectors of Christendom against the onslaughts of the Moslems. Correspondingly, the Eastern Empire lost its potency. Charlemagne was the logical choice for emperor of the Roman Empire. He had made Saxony, Lombardy, Bavaria, Aquitaine, and the Spanish mark part of his possessions, and he had fought against the Lombards and the Saracens. Above all, his wars had been undertaken with the support of the Pope; and, through Christianizing many pagans, he had enlarged the dominion of the Church. He issued regulations which were designed to stamp out the heathen spirit. For example, we read in his Saxon capitulary:

"If anyone shall have fled to a church for refuge, let no one presume to expel him from the church by violence, but he shall be left in peace until he shall be brought to the judicial assemblage; and on account of the honor due to God and the saints, and the reverence due to the church itself, let his life and all his members be granted to him. Moreover, let him plead his cause as best he can and he shall be judged; and so let him be led to the presence of the



lord king, and the latter shall send him where it shall have seemed fitting to his clemency.

"If anyone shall have entered a church by violence and shall have carried off anything in it by force or theft, or shall have burned the church itself, let him be punished by death.

"If anyone, out of contempt for Christianity, shall have despised the holy Lenten fast and shall have eaten flesh, let him be punished by death. But, nevertheless, let it be taken into consideration by a priest, lest perchance any one from necessity has been led to eat flesh.

"If anyone shall have killed a bishop or priest or deacon, let him likewise be punished capitally."<sup>1</sup>

On Christmas Day in the year 800, Charlemagne was in Rome. This was not his first visit, but the most important one. Pope Leo had been accused of various offenses and for a short time had been deposed from his office. Having purified himself of the charges by taking a sacred oath, Leo was judged innocent by Charlemagne and thus again became head of the Church.

During the Christmas service at St. Peter's, while Charles humbly knelt in prayer before the high altar, the Pope suddenly approached him and placed a golden crown upon his head. The people shouted in unison: "Long life and victory to Charles Augustus, the mighty emperor, the peace-bringer, crowned by God!" This coronation scene was probably one of the most dramatic events of the Middle Ages. However, the *de facto* power of Charlemagne had not been extended. Actually, the Eastern Empire continued as a sovereign power, and the Holy Roman Empire was more a fiction than a political reality.

Einhard described Charlemagne as being large and strong, with a lofty stature. Brave in battle, Charlemagne was also wise in council and did everything in his power to promote learning. His interest in German culture produced, among other things, a collection of old hero tales, an ordinance against confining prayer to Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and the composition of a German grammar. He also stimulated the learning of Latin and applied himself to the promotion of liberal studies with great diligence.

As a ruler, he attempted to perpetuate justice and order throughout his realm. So great was his reputation that the Patriarch of Jerusalem gave him sacred relics and the keys of the Holy Sepulcher, and the famous Haroun al-Raschid sent ambassadors with

<sup>1</sup> Webster, *Historical selections*, p. 412.

splendid gifts. Charlemagne patterned his government at home on a theocratic ideal. He intended, as ruler, to establish the moral standards of the Bible throughout the empire, as can be shown by the general instruction issued in 802. Each of his subjects who was twelve years old or more had to swear allegiance to him as emperor. The oath, however, was more far-reaching than just an expression of personal loyalty. It attempted to prescribe a rule of life, for clergy as well as for laity, and sought to bind "those who swear it to live, each according to his strength and knowledge, in the holy service of God."

General laws, the capitularies, were to be made public by the *missi dominici* (the king's messengers), who traveled throughout the realm to see that the laws were enforced. Sent out usually in pairs, a bishop and a count, they had to check up on the acts of the feudal lords.

The Church in this period gave up its policy of withdrawal from the affairs of the world. In the Carolingian age, many inhabitants of the City of God came "down to earth," to help reorganize the affairs of the secular society and to raise the standards of morals, education, and public welfare.

Charlemagne appointed bishops as well as secular officials and employed both as *missi dominici* and ministers, holding them equally responsible for any misrule. The emperor also administered monastic as well as state property. In the same assemblies which dealt with heresy, such as the council of Frankfort in 794, laws were issued against political offenses and other administrative abuses. Often, therefore, Charlemagne prefaced his letters with the sentence, "By the aid of God, who has established us on the throne of our power." Like Constantine, he presided over the Church councils and introduced tithes for the support of the religious authorities.

In his cultural endeavors, Charlemagne was able to secure the co-operation of the learned men of his empire. At the court there were Peter of Pisa, who instructed the king in grammar; Paulus Diaconus, who wrote on the history of the Lombards; and the famous Einhard, minister of public works, the emperor's biographer and secretary.

### ALCUIN

Alcuin, the most famous of Charlemagne's advisers, came from England, where he had profited from instruction at the school of York, which probably possessed one of the best libraries in Europe in the 8th century. In 781 he met Charlemagne at Parma, where the monarch

invited him to join him in his realm with a view to establishing learning there. With three followers, Alcuin instructed pupils at the palace at Aachen, which contained many members of the royal family, Charlemagne, himself, being often present. Compared to the modern school curriculum, the mode and content of instruction at the palace were meager but not without stimulation, since Alcuin utilized the dialectical technique of teaching.

Charlemagne aspired to make the nobility literate and to spread the new learning throughout his realm. Therefore he desired to obtain the most capable instructors in the land. Once he protested that he did not have twelve clerics of Augustine's and Jerome's caliber. Whereupon Alcuin rebuked him for his immodesty, since the "Lord was satisfied with two." Otherwise, Alcuin admired the unflagging efforts of the king in the direction of education.

Spurred by Alcuin's high motives, Charlemagne himself issued a famous capitulary, setting forth a plan of enlightenment. In it he stressed the fact that right living and conformance to the orders were not sufficient. God would also be pleased by "right speaking," he wrote, and knowledge preceded action. Then he mentioned the uncouth letters which he had received from the monasteries:

"And hence we have begun to fear that, if their skill in writing is so small, so also their power of rightly comprehending the Holy Scriptures may be far less than is befitting; and it is known to all that, if verbal errors are dangerous, errors of interpretation are still more so. We exhort you, therefore, not only not to neglect the study of letters but to apply yourselves thereto with that humble perseverance which is well-pleasing to God, that so you may be able with the greater ease and accuracy to search into the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures. For, as in the sacred pages there are images and tropes and other similar figures, no one can doubt that the quickness with which the reader apprehends the spiritual sense will be proportionate to the extent of his previous instruction in letters. But let the men chosen for this task be such as are both themselves able and willing to learn and eager withal to impart their learning to others. And let the zeal with which the work is done equal the earnestness with which we now ordain it. For we desire that you may be marked, as behooves the soldiers of the Church, within by devotion, and without by wisdom—chaste in your life, learned in your speech—so that if any comes to you to call upon the Divine Master, or to behold the excellence of the

religious life, they may be not only edified by your aspect when they regard you, but instructed by your wisdom when they hear you read or chant, and may return home rejoicing and giving thanks to God Most High."<sup>2</sup>

The teamwork of the king and Alcuin in promoting religious matters came about because both were opposed to image worship and the heretical errors of the Adoptionists. Since these subjects involved state policy, very definite principles of opposition had to be worked out. Alcuin refuted the position of the Adoptionists, that Christ was adopted by God rather than begotten, and vigorously inveighed against image worship. As a result, the council of Frankfort in 794 proceeded to condemn both image worship and the Adoptionist heresy.

Henceforth Alcuin whole-heartedly turned his interests towards religious matters and retired in 796 to the monastery of St. Martin's at Tours. He still maintained his contact with the outside, wrote prolific letters, tried to teach, and corrected books. In his adherence to orthodoxy he became intolerant of the slightest murmur of non-conformity. Thus, he made one of his monks do penance for reading Vergil.

Moral ideals became dominant in Alcuin's later life. They were intermingled with his other teachings. At Aachen, he had been as much an instructor as a guardian of morality. He taught the princesses to be chaste, and his students to be models in their daily dealings and to avoid the alluring temptations of the world. He wrote: "He who would be always with God ought frequently to pray and frequently to read, for when we pray we are speaking with God, and when we read, God is speaking to us." It is natural to expect that such a man would devote most of his work to the study of the Bible and other religious exercises.

Alcuin's educational writings were overwhelmingly in the field of the trivium, and no mention of them need be made here since they follow no original patterns, with the exception of the preface to his *Grammar*. In a stimulating dialogue between Alcuin and his pupils, a noteworthy view is taken as to the end of education. Alcuin thought that philosophy is the mistress of virtues and, alone of all earthly riches, never makes its possessor unhappy. According to him, eternal happiness can be attained in things that are within us rather than alien to us. Wisdom he found within the soul, while the gathering of riches is outside its proper sphere; the one is permanent

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 574.

and cannot be lost, the other is perishable and entails bitter grief for man. Wisdom, itself, should be loved for the sake of God and for understanding, but not for material gain, for honors, nor for the enjoyment of transitory pleasures.

Charlemagne lived for ten years after Alcuin's death, holding his far-flung realm together by his powerful personality and with the aid of intelligent advisers. When he, in turn, passed away, the decentralizing tendencies of the age surged up and overwhelmed everything else. The ensuing disruption and chaos in government form a vivid parallel to earlier conditions, and amidst this political disintegration only a few scholars stand out.

### RABANUS MAURUS

Typical of the period was Rabanus Maurus, a student of Alcuin. It was from the abbey school at Fulda, where he received his early education, that Rabanus traveled with a few fellow students to St. Martin's at Tours. Alcuin had taken an instinctive liking for the young student, calling him Maurus after the favorite disciple of St. Benedict. Rabanus felt even greater admiration for his master and planned to follow Alcuin as his prototype for a career as *scholasticus* at Fulda. The student, however, finally surpassed his teacher in the range of his knowledge and scholastic interests.

Since Rabanus lived amidst civil war, famines, and diseases, his organizing genius was sorely needed, and he was consistently promoted to higher positions. In 822 he became the abbot of Fulda, where he continued to devote his spare time to educational studies. After twenty years of conscientious service in this position, Rabanus resigned to find more time for writing and research. Again he was called to assume official duties in 847, when he was elected, against his wish, archbishop of Mainz. He died in 856.

Like all the educated men of his period, Rabanus looked to the Holy Scriptures as the foundation of knowledge. With Teutonic thoroughness he wrote commentaries on twenty-three books of the Old and the New Testament without neglecting the study of the liberal arts. Regarding pagan knowledge Rabanus was more broad-minded than Alcuin; in fact, he was more broad-minded than most of his contemporaries. He thought wisdom could be found in pagan as well as Christian minds.

One might conclude that such a man was mainly moved by utilitarian motives in his use of antique knowledge. Such a view does little justice to Rabanus. For example, unlike Alcuin, he included

the study of literature in his treatment of grammar; and through logic, he thought, one can discriminate between truth and falsehood—a most influential view for the later development of this discipline. Rhetoric Rabanus recommended as an aid to the Christian preachers against the guile of the heretics and for the settlement of civil disputes.

Rabanus discovered, likewise, valid reasons for making a place in the curriculum for the rest of the liberal arts. Mathematics he praised, because it was said that Abraham had taught astronomical and arithmetical lore to the Egyptians. The Church fathers also had believed that arithmetic could distract the mind from sensuous desires and focus it on contemplation of the divine. Even the Holy Scriptures recommend the study of this weighty subject, he declared, since so many mystical numbers are found therein. Without hesitation he also referred to Plato to substantiate his argument, inasmuch as Plato had said that the world was created according to mathematical laws.

And so Rabanus continued to uphold the foundation of the liberal arts. Geometry possessed for him a strange divinity of its own. He maintained that the tabernacle and the temple had been built according to geometrical laws consonant with the movement of the heavenly bodies, and that music, besides being a part of church service, contained harmonies used in the creation of the world. Lastly, Rabanus recommended an understanding of astronomy in order to destroy the numerous superstitions of the masses and as a reliable guide to the vast secrets of nature.

Many of Rabanus' arguments can scarcely be called rational. The reasons he cited for the study of the liberal arts are taken from the most diverse authorities, including the Church fathers, the Bible, the pagan philosophers, and the legends collected and accumulated by the encyclopedists. However, we can discern a vital principle in Rabanus' judgment of secular learning. He regarded truth and wisdom as virtues, directly inspired by Providence, existing in secular and religious sources, in intelligent and simple minds. This was his unifying ideal which could justify his own classification of knowledge.

One of the most remarkable tractates of Rabanus is a work in which he defended Louis the Pious against the accusations of Louis' sons, who had dethroned their father. As a theologian, Rabanus approached the controversy by quoting Biblical statements about the necessity of honoring one's parents. Then, in eloquent words, he

pictured the blessing of such action. It is, furthermore, displeasing to God to see stubborn resistance against lawful authorities, he declared, and tried to prove this statement by mentioning the evil fate of those who rebel against their parents.

### SERVATUS LUPUS

While Rabanus Maurus wrote about the political disintegration of his time, Servatus Lupus, abbot of Ferrières, suffered personally from its consequences. During his lifetime he saw Paris besieged twice; he witnessed the constant raids of the Northmen, who were devastating the country. Like Rabanus, whose teachings he enjoyed, he preferred a quiet life devoted solely to scholarship. Instead, he was called upon to undertake diplomatic missions; to attend ecclesiastical synods and diets; and, most unpleasant of all, to take part in military expeditions. In his correspondence one can catch a glimpse of the low esteem in which learning was held.

Servatus Lupus' ambition was to acquire a wide knowledge of the classics. Hence he was an indefatigable borrower of books and manuscripts, and he corresponded with distant monasteries. In his letters he touched upon the most diverse subjects, quoting nearly every classical writer known in his time. Most of his leisure he spent correcting, explaining, and annotating old manuscripts. Contrasted to Rabanus, Lupus Servatus was little interested in theological matters, since he had a humanistic proclivity for the classics. His authority was such that he was consulted by all those who were interested in classical knowledge.

### STRABO

Another admirer of Rabanus was Walafrid Strabo. As a compiler and scholar, he attained a unique authority in the Middle Ages. His *Glossa ordinaria*, a prodigious commentary on the Old and the New Testament, was used on numerous occasions by the proponents of Scholasticism. Such a work, through its bulky size and dry content, would scarcely interest a modern reader. Much more instructive than the *Glossa* is his poetry, especially his account of the vision of Wettin, abbot of Reichenau.

Strabo related that Wettin had been sick for three days, seemingly unconscious. The monks who surrounded his bed were chanting prayers for the life of their abbot. In a vision Wettin saw the face of the devil, who was dressed like a cleric and surrounded by armed demons. The abbot was relieved of the torments inflicted by the

guiles of the evil forces when angels appeared to chase the demons away. One of these angels was the guardian of the abbot, and with this angel he started a conversation. Suddenly the abbot awakened and saw his fellow monks assembled around his bed.

As Wettin fell asleep again, the angel came back and led him to a brilliant world. There he saw gigantic mountains and a fiery river in which sinners were suffering the punishment of hell. In it he recognized many priests—some of high position and some of the lower clergy; with them were their concubines, who also were being tortured.

After viewing hell, Wettin saw purgatory: a tower filled with smoke, wherein the monks were to stay to be purified until the day of judgment. Next, Wettin looked at a mountain of majestic grandeur. He was told by his companion that sinners were living there exposed to the wind and the rain. Among them was Charlemagne, punished for his profligacy but evidently destined for eternal life.

At last the abbot came to paradise, the abode of the saints. His companion then told him that he had died on this day and that he must obtain the blessing of Christ for his salvation. For this purpose Wettin asked the intercession of the saints and the martyrs, but only the Holy Virgin could help him. Deeply grateful for her assistance, he exclaimed over the advantages of virginity and the blessings of a celibate life. Then the angel asked him to return to life to tell about his experiences in the other world.

Throughout the poem there is much moralization. Sermons are delivered on the immorality of the clergy, the necessity for justice, and the manifold temptations of the world. To succumb to them means to submit to the devil, Strabo pointed out, and to suffer the torments of hell.

Strabo was equally skillful in narrating tales about the lives of the saints. Such literature appealed strongly to his contemporaries' desire for supernatural aids. Religion had become extremely materialistic, and the adoration of the Cross and images, the frequent pilgrimages, and the collection of relics became pronounced features of the religious life of the people. Against this blind credulity and superstitious spirit only a few thinkers waged unceasing warfare.

### ERIGENA

Among those who tried to instill a more lofty spirit into religion we find Eriugena. We know little about his life. Born in Ireland at the beginning of the 9th century, he was patronized by Charles the



Bald, who had such confidence in him that he put him in charge of his palace school. Charles ordered him to translate the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and of Maximus Confessor.

Eriugena was an excellent scholar, and his knowledge of Greek was probably unsurpassed in the 9th century. He wrote not merely on philosophy but also on religion, in which field he composed a treatise on predestination which indicated his unorthodox position. He was consequently condemned by the Church. Incidentally, he took part in the controversy regarding transubstantiation, and he commented on several books of the Bible.

Unlike most of the other philosophers of the Middle Ages, Eriugena retained an attitude of *intellectual* independence. While he officially adhered to the dogmas of the Church, he held views contrary to the spirit of medieval Christianity. The starting point of his philosophy is God. Like Plotinus, he maintained that the nature of God is ineffable; thus, we cannot describe God, for he is beyond goodness, beyond truth, and beyond holiness. We can call God good if we are certain that we apply this term in a *symbolic* sense. Philosophically speaking, however, God can only be defined *negatively*.

Eriugena divided nature into four parts. The first is nature *uncreated and creating*, which he identified with God in his primary condition. Emphasizing the transcendence of God, Eriugena declared that God cannot know himself. He is even more sublime than the Aristotelian concept of deity, for if God had self-knowledge, it would take away from his supreme perfection. It would introduce the category of thought, to which God would be subordinated. It is noteworthy that Eriugena denied creation out of nothing. In this thought he went back to the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation: God, who is everywhere, is the source of all substances. Things are real insofar as they are near God; they are unreal insofar as they are distant from divine perfection.

The second division of nature, Eriugena wrote, is nature *created and creating*. Now God is in active relationship with the universe. Eriugena used the logos doctrine to indicate that God contains all the universal forms according to which the world is patterned. He identified the creation of the universe with the action of the Son, Jesus Christ, who to him had mainly a metaphysical significance. We must not interpret him, however, to mean that Christ is merely human, for he made it clear that Christ, like the forms of the universe, is eternal.

The third stage deals with particular Being. It is characterized as nature *created without creating* itself, accomplished through the Holy Spirit, through which the corporeal universe emerges. Now we are conscious of space and time, according to Eriugena. Now we have reached the most distant point from God. Still, even human beings participate in the greatness of God, for all of nature manifests his majesty.

Eriugena explained that although man's mind is the noblest aspect of his nature, we can never know the *essence* of the human mind:

"For as God is comprehensible in that one deduces from creation that he is, and is incomprehensible because what he is can be comprehended by no understanding, human or angelic, nor even by himself because he is not a *what*, but is superessential: so it is given to the human mind to know only this, that it is, but it is in no way granted to it to know what it is; and, what is even more to be wondered at and more beautiful to those who contemplate themselves and their God, the human mind is more to be praised in its ignorance than in its knowledge. . . . The divine likeness in the human mind, therefore, is recognized most clearly in that it is known only to be; but what it is is not known; and, to put it thus, in it we deny that it is anything and affirm only that it is."<sup>3</sup>

Eriugena stated that man is the most important part of creation: "Moreover, we are commanded, not irrationally, to believe and understand that every visible and invisible creature was created in man alone, since there is no substance created which is not understood to be in him; no species, or difference, or property, or natural accident is found in the nature of things which either is not inherent in him naturally or the knowledge of which can not be in him; and the very knowledge of things, which are contained within him, is better than the things of which it is knowledge to the extent that the nature in which it is formed is better. Every rational nature however is set by right reason before every irrational and sensible nature since it is nearer to God. Wherefore too the things of which knowledge is inherent in human nature are understood not inconsistently to subsist in their ideas. For where they undergo their knowledge better, there they must be judged to exist more truly. Furthermore, if the things themselves subsist more truly in their ideas than in themselves, and if the ideas of them are naturally present in man, then they were created universally in man. The return of all things into man will doubtless prove this in its time. For by what reason would they

<sup>3</sup> *On the division of nature*, Bk. iv, ch. 7.

return into him if they did not possess a certain connatural kinship in him and if they did not proceed in a certain manner from him?"<sup>4</sup>

The fourth division of Eriugena's system indicates a return to God. It is characterized by nature, which *neither creates nor is created*. The creatures which have emanated from God are now seeking a divine homecoming. The lower change into higher categories of Being and all are re-absorbed into the divine essence.

Like the Greek Church fathers, Eriugena taught that evil is not metaphysically real. And he did not accept the doctrine of a literal hell. He was much more optimistic than St. Augustine and had a more spiritual interpretation of Christian dogmas. In his theory of knowledge he stressed an extreme *realism*. Only the universal has reality. In the phenomenal universe the highest categories have the most exalted status, and particular things exist insofar as they participate in their universality. He described the process of knowledge in a twofold way. On the one hand, we have an intuitive knowledge of God, who gives us an understanding of first principles and of the action of phenomena. On the other hand, we can start with sense knowledge and internal introspection through which God is revealed.

The Neo-Platonism of Eriugena is evident in his belief that the most important part of knowledge is the part which deals with God, for, since God is a universal substance, the author and governor of everything, knowledge of his actions and his relationship with the world is the most sublime. This knowledge, Eriugena felt, is best achieved through *reason*. Unlike St. Augustine, he did not rely on the sacraments of the Church to expand human thinking.

In general, Eriugena's system can be described as containing *pantheistic* and *realistic* factors. In him the Neo-Platonic spirit gained a definite victory. More than any other thinker of his generation, he tried to give a spiritual interpretation of Christian dogmas, and he tried to show that the way of philosophy is superior to the way of theology.

## ANSELM

Quite different from Eriugena was Anselm, who, throughout his life, was a faithful son of the Church. He came from a noble family in Piedmont, where he was born in 1033. In his youth he entered

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. iv, ch. 8.

the monastery of Bec in Normandy. In 1093 he became archbishop of Canterbury and took part in the dispute between the papacy and the secular lords.

Throughout his career Anselm tried to improve the moral condition of the clergy. There was a strain of mysticism in him, and faith was an intensely personal matter to him. His three main works are the *Monologium*, which deals with the being of God; the *Proslogium*, which contains his famous proof of the existence of God; and the *Cur Deus homo*, which contains his doctrine of atonement and indicates how man can be saved through Christ.

In the philosophy of Anselm, *faith* is the central theme. Belief in the truth of Christianity, then, is primary. Thus we understand his statement *Credo ut intelligam*. Revelation must be accepted before we can start philosophizing. Reason, thus, is merely an aid to revelation. The Platonic influence played an important part in the development of Anselm's philosophy. Like Plato, Anselm was a realist, and he believed that universals exist outside of particular things. Such essences as truth, beauty, and goodness do not need particular exemplifications, he thought, for their existence is autonomous.

In attempting to prove the existence of God, Anselm pointed to the relativity of all concepts. Since perfection varies in the created substances, he declared, there must be a *universal* perfection. He believed that finite things are not self-created, thereby pointing to a universal author, namely God. Furthermore, all beings share a certain amount of goodness, indicating that a *supreme* goodness exists in which all beings participate.

Anselm's main quest in the *Proslogium* is an understanding of God:

"Be it mine to look up to thy light, even from afar, even from the depths. Teach me to seek thee, and reveal thyself to me, when I seek thee, for I cannot seek thee, except thou teach me, nor find thee, except thou reveal thyself. Let me seek thee in longing, let me long for thee in seeking; let me find thee in love, and love thee in finding. Lord, I acknowledge and I thank thee that thou hast created me in this thine image, in order that I may be mindful of thee, may conceive of thee, and love thee; but that image has been so consumed and wasted away by vices, and obscured by the smoke of wrongdoing, that it cannot achieve that for which it was made, except thou renew it, and create it anew. I do not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree thy

truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe—that unless I believed, I should not understand.”<sup>5</sup>

Now the fool will say that there is no God, Anselm maintained, yet even the fool is convinced that something exists in man’s mind, of which nothing greater can be conceived.

“For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

“Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.”<sup>6</sup>

Anselm identified this being with God. “And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, Our God.”<sup>7</sup>

As early as Anselm’s own time a monk, Gaunilo, felt that a concept in our mind does not necessarily have an objective existence. For example, we may think of a perfect island in the middle of the ocean, but the island does not necessarily exist. A vigorous controversy flared up between the two, and Anselm tried to refute Gaunilo by showing that the existence of the island is contingent, whereas the existence of God is *necessary*. In short, he declared, when we think of the greatest being we necessarily think of God.

What are the attributes of God? How can he be characterized? Anselm, like Augustine, described the unity, eternity, goodness, and

<sup>5</sup> *Proslogium*, ch. 1 (translated by Sidney N. Deane).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 111.

perfection of God. He made it clear that God does not exist in space or time, but that all things exist in God.

"But if through thine eternity thou hast been, and art, and wilt be; and to have been is not to be destined to be; and to be is not to have been, or to be destined to be; how does thine eternity exist as a whole forever? Or is it true that nothing of thy eternity passes away, so that it is not now; and that nothing of it is destined to be, as if it were not yet?"

"Thou wast not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be tomorrow; but yesterday and today and tomorrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow thou art; but simply, thou art, outside all time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow have no existence, except in time; but thou, although nothing exists without thee, nevertheless dost not exist in space or time, but all things exist in thee. *For nothing contains thee, but thou containest all.*"<sup>8</sup>

All beings need God for their sustenance, wrote Anselm. In God, we find life and wisdom.

"Therefore, thou alone, O Lord, art what thou art; and thou art he who thou art. For, what is one thing in the whole and another in the parts, and in which there is any mutable element, is not altogether what it is. And what begins from non-existence, and can be conceived not to exist, and unless it subsists through something else, returns to non-existence; and what has a past existence, which is no longer, or a future existence, which is not yet,—this does not properly and absolutely exist.

"But thou art what thou art, because, whatever thou art at any time, or in any way, thou art as a whole and forever. And thou art he who thou art, properly and simply; for thou hast neither a past existence nor a future, but only a present existence; nor canst thou be conceived as at any time non-existent. But thou art life, and light, and wisdom, and blessedness, and many goods of this nature. And yet thou art only one supreme good; thou art all-sufficient to thyself, and needest none; and thou art he whom all things need for their existence and well-being."<sup>9</sup>

In his doctrine of salvation, Anselm explained how mankind became doomed to damnation through the fall of Adam. The fall, he said, was a deliberate violation of God's will, and only Christ's atonement could bring about the freedom of man. The restoration

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. xix.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. xxii.

of man he regarded as a miraculous act which indicates the mercy of God.

"But after man was made he deserved, by his sin, to lose his existence together with its design; though he never has wholly lost this, *viz.*, that he should be one capable of being punished, or of receiving God's compassion. For neither of these things could take effect if he were annihilated. Therefore God's restoring man is more wonderful than his creating man, inasmuch as it was done for the sinner contrary to his deserts; while the act of creation was not for the sinner, and was not in opposition to man's deserts. How great a thing it is, also, for God and man to unite in one person, that, while the perfection of each nature is preserved, the same being may be both God and man! Who, then, will dare to think that the human mind can discover how wisely, how wonderfully, so incomprehensible a work has been accomplished?"<sup>10</sup>

In this way we can understand the compassion of God: "We have found it, I say, so great and so consistent with his holiness, as to be incomparably above anything that can be conceived. For what compassion can excel these words of the Father, addressed to the sinner doomed to eternal torments and having no way of escape: 'Take my only begotten Son and make him an offering for yourself'; or these words of the Son: 'Take me, and ransom your souls.' For these are the voices they utter, when inviting and leading us to faith in the Gospel. Or can anything be more just than for him to remit all debt since he has earned a reward greater than all debt, if given with the love which he deserves."<sup>11</sup>

In his theory of knowledge Anselm showed that man rises from sense experience to intellectual knowledge and finally grasps the divine majesty through a *mystic light*. The highest good for man, Anselm asserted, is the contemplation of God's majesty. We are in bondage as long as we are guided by worldly desires and as long as we are subject to sensual appetites. We achieve emancipation and freedom when we are guided by God and when we realize that only through God do we have life and being. Unlike Eriugena, however, Anselm remained orthodox in his theology. In emphasizing the gulf which separates man from God, he was certain that without the Church man cannot be saved.

<sup>10</sup> *Cur Deus homo*, Bk. II, ch. xvi.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. xx.

## QUESTIONS &amp; TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways did Charlemagne aid education?
2. Describe Alcuin's view of the liberal arts.
3. What was Anselm's concept of faith?
4. Describe Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God.
5. What is the role of Christ, according to Anselm?
6. In what ways was Anselm a Platonist?
7. Describe Eriugena's concept of reason.
8. Why was Eriugena unorthodox in his philosophy?
9. What is the significance of Eriugena's metaphysical views?
10. Compare Eriugena with Anselm.
11. What was Eriugena's concept of man?



## ARABIC AND JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

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### THE MOHAMMEDAN RELIGION

Few men in world history have influenced civilization as much as Mohammed, born *c.* 570. He never obtained a formal education, but he had a fervent spiritual insight. He developed a new religious movement based on the revelation of Allah, and so convinced was he that it was the only faith that he started to convert others. In his native city, Mecca, few would listen. Thus, in 622, he fled from Mecca to Medina; this flight is known as the "hegira." In Medina he became the acknowledged religious leader and developed a government based on theocratic principles. By 630 his faith had spread throughout Arabia, and when he passed away in 632 he had sown the seeds of a world religion.

The faith of Mohammedanism is based on the *Koran*, which is supposed to contain the words of the prophet. It consists of 114 chapters, and, like the Bible, contains a good deal of symbolism and poetry. Much of Mohammedanism depends on the Jewish and the Christian religion. In fact, Mohammed considered Christ one of the major prophets.

Among the main beliefs of Mohammed we find monotheism. He rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and asserted that God, or Allah, consists of an indivisible unity. It is the task of man to submit to Allah's dogmas. The laws of God, thus, are all-powerful; God rewards those who follow his ways and punishes those who violate his ordinances. Another tenet of Mohammed is that God has revealed himself directly in the *Koran*. The precepts of this book, consequently, are not mere moral ordinances but represent the will of God.

In Mohammedanism there are twenty-eight prophets. Most of them come from the Old Testament; yet, strangely enough, Alexander the Great is included in the list.

Mohammed believed in angels, some of whom are good and favor man, while others are evil and try to tempt human beings. Incidentally, there is a personal devil which the Mohammedans call Shaitin. In Mohammedanism there are also other supernatural elements. There is belief in the Day of Judgment, when Allah will assign men either to paradise or to hell. Paradise is described as a lovely oasis which satisfies all the desires of man, while hell is viewed as a magnified desert in which the sinners are tortured.

After the death of Mohammed, the religion spread like wildfire. It unified the warring Arabian tribes and imbued them with a love for battle, since it taught that those who die for the faith are rewarded in paradise. But the military strength of the Arabs was probably less significant than their *tolerant policy regarding subject populations*. In the main, the Arabs were far more tolerant in their attitude than the Christians, and they often granted religious freedom to other faiths.

Mohammed's immediate followers, who were called Caliphs, expanded the power of Islam throughout the Near East. They made inroads into Africa and threatened western Europe. A period of civil war ensued between 656 and 661 when several contenders vied for the overlordship of the Moslem world. Ultimately, the Ommiad rulers triumphed and ruled from 661 to 750. They were succeeded by the Abbasid dynasty, which lasted from 750 to 1258 and under which Islam reached its height.

### MOSLEM CULTURE

In many ways Moslem culture was far superior to that of Christian Europe. It was furthered by numerous scholars, who translated many of the ancient authorities and thereby preserved Greek learn-

ing. A magnificent library was established at Bagdad, the splendor of which could not be duplicated in western Europe. Nor were the fine arts neglected.

In science the Arabs used the *empirical* method. They established hospitals which had separate wards for men and women, and which frequently contained their own libraries. They set high standards for the medical profession. They made fundamental contributions to the field of optics, especially through Alhazen (965-1039?) They laid the foundation of physical science by their careful studies of mathematics, and they advanced chemistry through their classification of drugs and their interest in alchemy.

In geography the Arabs exhibited far more correct knowledge than the medieval Christians. They made exact maps and taught geography according to scientific principles. Especially significant in this field were Al-Idrisi and Yaqut, who compiled a geographical dictionary.

Like Christian Europe, Moslem civilization was torn apart by internal controversy. As it expanded its territory, the old faith appeared to be inadequate. Not only do we find a note of Epicureanism, especially in the *Arabian nights* and in Omar Khayyam's poetry, but we also encounter frank evidences of Skepticism.

Essentially, there was little originality in Arabian philosophical thinking. It became the task of philosophy to define the doctrines of faith. Great reliance was placed upon the ancient authorities, especially Aristotle, who, however, was interpreted according to the *Neo-Platonic* spirit. Throughout Moslem history we find an insistent conflict between those who believed in the rules of faith, and thus were guided by mysticism, and those who relied on reason and, hence, regarded revelation as an inferior approach to reality. The struggle was especially strong between the Sufis, who were mystics, and professional philosophers like Averrhoes, who believed in the supremacy of reason.

### AL-KINDI

Arabian philosophy found its first great representative in Al-Kindi (died 873), whose fame rests mainly upon his scholarship. Among other books, he translated the *Theology of Aristotle*, which he wrongly ascribed to the peripatetic philosopher.

We know only a few facts about Al-Kindi's career. His father was governor of one of the provinces, and he himself studied at Bagdad. He was highly regarded by the rulers of his time. He is

significant for laying the foundation of exact philosophical studies in Islam and for giving a Neo-Platonic interpretation to Aristotle.

### ALFARABI

Alfarabi (died *c.* 950) was more significant than Al-Kindi. In him we find many Neo-Platonic elements. He identified God with the One and believed that the goal of man is to return to the primary unity as represented by the absolute existence of God. Like the Neo-Platonists, he found no essential difference between the systems of Plato and Aristotle.

The Greek spirit was readily incorporated into the system of Alfarabi. He made it clear that before philosophy can be appreciated a knowledge of the natural and mathematical sciences is important. Logic, likewise, he regarded as a preparatory study. Initiation into philosophy, according to Alfarabi, involves both ethical and intellectual perfection.

Attempting to prove the existence of God, Alfarabi demonstrated that man has only an imperfect knowledge of God, for our intellect is limited.

"It is very difficult to know what God is because of the limitation of our intellect and its union with matter. Just as light is the principle by which colors become visible, in like manner it would seem logical to say that a perfect light should produce a perfect vision. Instead, the very opposite occurs. A perfect light dazzles the vision. The same is true of God. The imperfect knowledge we have of God is due to the fact that he is infinitely perfect. That explains why his infinitely perfect being bewilders our mind. But if we could strip our nature of all that we call 'matter,' then certainly our knowledge of his being would be quite perfect."<sup>1</sup>

Alfarabi influenced Western theologians by showing that God's existence can be proved in three main ways: first, by the argument based on motion, which leads us to a prime mover; second, by the argument based on efficient causation, which leads us to a first cause; and third, by the argument based on contingency, which establishes an absolute necessity.

Alfarabi declared God is characterized by infinity, immutability, truth, and perfection. He rejected the concept of personal creation; instead, he believed in emanation. Unlike most Christian philosophers, he reasoned that the world is eternal.

<sup>1</sup> *Political regime*, pp. 12-13.

"When people say that God created the world, they simply mean that God produced the world out of matter by clothing it with a determinate form. The world is certainly God's work, and though it comes after him as a world-form, yet it is equal to him in time or eternal, insofar as he could not begin to work on it in time. The reason for this is that God is to the world exactly what a cause is to its effect. Since the cause in this case is inseparable from the effect, it follows that he could not, in a given moment, start making it. For, if he could, that would simply imply imperfection on his part while he had been trying to achieve his goal. This, of course, is incompatible with the absolute perfection of God."<sup>2</sup>

### AVICENNA

Avicenna (980-1036) not only was interested in philosophy and theology but made an immense contribution to medicine. He wrote the *Canon of medicine*, which was translated into Latin in the 12th century by Gerard of Cremona.

Avicenna divided philosophy into two parts: one, speculative, containing mathematics, physics, and theology; the other, largely practical, consisting of economics, ethics, and politics. In logic he was especially concerned with clear definitions. In fact, throughout his writings we have a *conciseness* which was seldom attained in either the Moslem or the Western world.

In his theory of creation Avicenna labored under the influence of Neo-Platonism. Thus, he spoke about emanation and used triadic principles. He taught that reason is the superior faculty in man and that through it we can understand universal principles. However, according to him, the universal does not have an ontological existence; it exists simply as a mental concept in the human mind.

Following Aristotle, he held time to be dependent on movement; and he believed that the universe does not contain a vacuum. He made much of the active intellect which governs all phenomena beneath the moon and is responsible for the creation of man's soul.

Since Avicenna was concerned with defending the majesty of God, he taught that God alone has real Being, and that man realizes his destiny insofar as he identifies himself with God. The highest stage of knowledge, according to Avicenna, is mystical. In this stage we are able to obtain a clear comprehension of God. It indicates that man's soul cannot be corrupted by matter and that personal immortality is an undeniable fact.

<sup>2</sup> *The sources of questions*, in "Collection of various treatises," n. 6, pp. 67-68.

Thus, the philosophy of Avicenna is climaxed by his faith in intuition. Accepting the validity of prophecy, reason alone, he contended, is not sufficient if man wants to gain complete certainty.

### SUFISM

Avicenna was surpassed in mysticism by Al-Gazzali (1058-1111). The latter was strongly opposed to the philosophers, who, he thought, were corrupting the minds of the faithful. He made it clear that religion is superior to philosophical discipline and that no salvation can be gained without unconditional acceptance of the *Koran*. Reason, he asserted, is utterly limited, for it gives us only an understanding of phenomena. Thus he depended on mysticism, which gives us an understanding of invisible things and is the best introduction to the principles of reality.

To achieve the perfection of mysticism, Al-Gazzali recommended asceticism, including prayers, fasting, and the avoidance of all sensual pleasures. The doctrines of faith are not to be questioned, he taught, but are to be accepted willingly as the products of religious consciousness.

His main work in philosophy is *The destruction of the philosophers*. He is best known to the Western world through his *Confessions*, which give an emotional description of his intellectual pilgrimage and indicate that he was a penetrating and sensitive judge of human emotions.

Through the work of Al-Gazzali, the Sufis expanded their influence in Moslem culture. The Sufis, like Al-Gazzali, believed in an immediate awareness of God and were opposed to an elaborate theology. They taught that man is saved by faith rather than by intellectual investigation, and they affirmed the effectiveness of intuition. To some extent they represented a protest against an elaborate philosophy which was tending to obscure the primary content of the Mohammedan religion.

### AVERRHOES

The most influential of the Arabic philosophers was undoubtedly Averrhoes (1126-1198), who was born in Cordova. His main interest was in the field of medicine, and in his later years he became a court physician. During most of his life he was suspected of heresy, and for a time he was banished from Cordova. Among his works we find the *Destruction of the destruction*, designed as a reply to Al-

Gazzali, *On the agreement of religion with philosophy*, and *On the demonstration of religious dogmas*.

Averrhoes felt popular beliefs to be far inferior to philosophical truth, but he did not argue against the practices of the masses, who, he thought, are unable to comprehend spiritual reality. He said that the philosopher, on the other hand, relies mainly upon rational demonstrations, and his faith is therefore far more spiritual and elevated than that of the masses.

In the West Averrhoes' philosophy was interpreted as championing the twofold truth. In other words, something may be true in philosophy but at the same time not valid in religion. However, it is somewhat doubtful if this was the real view of Averrhoes, who held that there is no direct conflict between philosophy and religion.

While he did not read Aristotle in the original, his commentaries became famous throughout the Western world, and he was regarded as one of the standard authorities on the Greek philosopher. He was especially concerned with the active intellect, which he interpreted in an *impersonal* way. Thus, he did not believe in personal immortality. What remains after death, he maintained, is the intellectual quality which we share with the universal reason.

Following Neo-Platonic patterns, Averrhoes believed in the emanation of the various substances from the One and refused to accept the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Like Aristotle, he thought the universe to be eternal and, consequently, indestructible. Matter, thus, contains a universal potency. It is actualized through the forms which represent the rational structure of the universe.

Averrhoes defended, against Al-Gazzali, the value of philosophical discussion. He held that it could give a spiritual interpretation of the faith and lead to a symbolic explanation of dogmas which otherwise would be accepted in their literal sense. After his death Arabic philosophy declined, but his theories played an important part in Western scholastic circles.

## FOUNDATIONS OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Medieval Jewish philosophy was influenced to a great extent by Arabic theories. It tried to combine the principles of reason with the doctrines of faith, and in the work of Maimonides we find a synthesis which reminds us somewhat of the system of Aquinas. In the main, medieval Jewish philosophy was based on the belief that the Hebrew faith is superior to all others and that truth is best attained through the Jewish laws.

As in Arabic and Christian philosophy, the commentator spirit reigned supreme in medieval Jewish thinking. Ancient authorities were quoted at random and were respected as possessors of infallible wisdom. Especially great was the influence of Neo-Platonism and Aristotle. The conflict between faith and reason was just as strong in the Jewish religion as in Christian and Moslem philosophy. To many Jewish thinkers, philosophy was not merely a waste of time but a source of corruption to the mind of man, making him skeptical regarding revelation. Other thinkers were living in the expectation of the Messiah who would create a new world and establish a new kingdom in Palestine. They stressed the Beyond more than did their earlier compatriots.

Thus, supernaturalism became a permanent feature of the Jewish mind, but less stress was placed upon personal immortality than was evident in Christian theology. Instead, more attention was paid to the future triumph of the Jewish nation and the Jewish ideal of life.

During the Middle Ages the systematization of the Jewish faith took place. This is most evident in the philosophy of Maimonides, who reduced the 613 laws of the rabbis to thirteen articles which form the foundation of the Jewish religion. At this time, too, many Jewish scholars tried to prove by rational arguments that their revelation was superior to the revelations of Christ and Mohammed and that they were the chosen people of God. In this belief they represented the world-view of the Middle Ages, which generally accepted a dogmatic concept of life.

### AVICEBRON

Jewish philosophy was brilliantly represented by Solomon Ibn Gabirol (Avicbron), who lived in the 11th century in Spain. He was not only interested in philosophy but also a poet of note. His main work is the *Fountain of life*, in which he developed a philosophy based on Aristotelianism, Neo-Platonism, and Arabian sources.

In Avicbron's system, *monism* is all-important. God and matter, thus, are not two distinct realities, for matter is identified with God. Like Plotinus, he believed that God, as the principle of reality, is incomprehensible. From God we have a series of emanations which result in the creation of spiritual substances, soul and matter. Everywhere in the universe, according to Avicbron, we find a union of form and matter. He believed that a plurality of forms can exist in the same individual and that matter and form are found not merely in corporeal beings but also among spiritual substances. In this proc-



ess of emanation the essence of God does not change. His holiness remains the same, and his perfection remains unaltered. The universe, consequently, represents merely the reflection of God, who, in his essence, remains incomprehensible.

A mystic tone prevails in this Jewish philosopher, who held that man must get away from the corporeal world, abandon all sensual knowledge and, instead, face reality with a detached and spiritual perspective. The goal of man, thus, is a union of the soul with divine sources. Man's vision is hindered by the senses, but through knowledge and religious practices man may triumph over his lower self and achieve salvation.

In an eloquent poem called *The royal crown*, Avicebron shows the weakness of man. The pessimism is almost like that of Schopenhauer.

“Man entereth the world,  
And knoweth not why;  
He rejoiceth  
And knoweth not wherefore;  
He liveth,  
And knoweth not for how long.  
In his childhood he walketh in his own stubbornness,  
And when the spirit of lust beginneth in its season  
To stir him up to gather power and wealth,  
Then he journeyeth from his place  
To ride in ships  
And to tread in the deserts,  
And to carry his life to dens of lions,  
Adventuring in among wild beasts;  
And when he imagineth that great is his glory  
And that might is the spoil of his hand,  
Quietly stealeth the spoiler upon him,  
And his eyes are opened and there is naught.  
At every moment he is destined to troubles  
That pass and return,  
At every hour evils,  
At every moment chances,  
On every day terrors.  
If for an instant he stand in security,  
Suddenly disaster will come upon him,  
Either war shall come and the sword will smite him,

Or the bow of brass transpierce him;  
 Or the sorrows will overpower him;  
 Or the presumptuous billows flow over him,  
 Or sickness and steadfast evils shall find him,  
 Till he become a burden on his own soul,  
 And shall find the gall of serpents in his honey."<sup>3</sup>

Amidst these ordeals what can man do? How can he gain certainty? Avicbron answers, Only by reliance on God. Thus the poem ends:

"Therefore I beseech Thee, O my God,  
 Remember the distresses that come upon man,  
 And if I have done evil  
 Do thou me good at my latter end,  
 Nor requite measure for measure  
 To man whose sins are measureless,  
 And whose death is a joyless departure."<sup>4</sup>

### JUDAH HALEVI

Like Avicbron, Judah Halevi was a poet and a philosopher. In him Jewish nationalism played an important role, and all his life he looked forward to a return to Palestine. He undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but we do not know if he ever reached that city.

Like Al-Gazzali, Halevi believed that reason is inferior to religion, for reason gives only a quantitative interpretation of life. It does not see the living reality of God and hence relies on demonstrations which frequently obscure real faith. God, Halevi affirmed, is to be found through love, spiritual insight, and a ready acceptance of revelation.

He was certain that the Jewish nation has a glorious destiny. Did not the Jews produce the prophets, he asked; did not the Jews initiate the moral traditions of the Western world? Did not Jewish suffering throughout the ages indicate that theirs is a special destiny?

Like Philo, Halevi subordinated philosophy to prophecy. In his opinion, philosophy can give only an inadequate explanation of the universe, whereas prophecy produces an immediate contact with God. Being orthodox, he was certain that personal immortality cannot be denied. However, morality is not to be influenced by the expectation that if we are good we will be rewarded in the Beyond;

<sup>3</sup> *Gabirol's selected poems*, translated by Israel Zangwill.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

rather, we are to exercise virtue for its own sake, as it leads to a more sublime life.

In his world-view Halevi refused to accept a mechanistic account of the universe. Following Jewish tradition, he thought God's providence rules all parts of creation and the Biblical tradition should be accepted as infallible.

### MAIMONIDES

Maimonides was born in 1135 in Cordova. In his youth he visited Palestine; later he settled in Cairo, where he went into the jewelry business. Afterwards, he practiced medicine and became court physician to Saladin's prime minister. In Cairo he was widely respected both for his scientific knowledge and for his philosophical wisdom. He became head of the Jewish community in Egypt, and when he died in 1204 he was mourned by both Jews and Arabs as an outstanding thinker. In his main work, *The guide for the perplexed*, Maimonides tried to combine the philosophy of Aristotle with the teachings of Moses and attempted to give a rational explanation of the faith.

He regarded the study of metaphysics, which he equated with the knowledge of God, as the most significant subject of inquiry. It is not to be taken lightly, he said, and those who want to devote themselves to the subject should have preliminary instruction in the sciences, logic, and the Bible.

Maimonides realized how difficult metaphysics is. Most people are unable to understand immaterial causes. Subject to transitory passions and dependent on sensual pleasures, they do not have enough detachment to appreciate metaphysical principles. Furthermore, they are unwilling to dedicate themselves to the arduous study which metaphysics necessitates.

In the philosophy of Maimonides, God occupies an all-important position. He made it clear that in God there is no corporeality, no potentiality, and no resemblance to his creatures. In short, when we speak of God we can use only negative attributes. In this way he indicated that God is beyond all human knowledge and understanding. Maimonides insisted upon the *transcendence of God*. Does this mean, then, that God is not concerned with the world and that there is no Providence? Does this imply that our prayers are not answered? Maimonides replied, God is definitely concerned with the universe and conscious of our prayers. In a word, Maimonides used the arguments regarding the transcendence of God to indicate God's

perfection, without, however, making God disinterested in human affairs.

Unlike Aristotle, he did not believe that the universe is eternal. It is created in time, and it exhibits teleological laws, he declared. He followed Aristotle, however, in showing that the matter of the heavens is quite different from the corporeal structure of the earth. He made much of the active intellect, which, unlike Avicbron, he described as being composed of pure form.

In his ethical principles Maimonides stressed moderation. Thus he was not a proponent of asceticism. According to him, we must follow the laws but not mortify our flesh. The aim of man is to know God, he taught. All our activities should be guided by this purpose. Thus we should work and enjoy our leisure not as goals in themselves, but so that we may have time to study the laws and the revelation of God.

Maimonides spoke of four kinds of perfection. The first and the lowest relates to property.

"The possession of money, garments, furniture, servants, land, and the like. The possession of the title of a great king belongs to this class. There is no close connection between this possession and its possessor; it is a perfectly imaginary relation when on account of the great advantage a person derives from these possessions, he says, 'This is my house, this is my servant, this is my money, and these are my hosts and armies.' For when he examines himself, he will find that all these things are external, and their qualities are entirely independent of the possessor. When, therefore, that relation ceases, he that has been a great king may one morning find that there is no difference between him and the lowest person, and yet no change has taken place in the things which were ascribed to him. The philosophers have shown that he whose sole aim in all his exertions and endeavors is the possession of this kind of perfection, only seeks perfectly imaginary and transient things; and even if these remain his property all his lifetime, they do not give him any perfection."<sup>5</sup>

The second kind of perfection includes man's body.

"This kind of perfection must likewise be excluded from forming our chief aim; because it is a perfection of the body, and man does not possess it as man, but as a living being; he has this property besides in common with the lowest animal; and even if a person possesses the greatest possible strength, he could not be as strong as a mule, much less can he be as strong as a lion or an elephant; he,

<sup>5</sup> Maimonides, *Guide* III, 53.

therefore, can at the utmost have strength that might enable him to carry a heavy burden, or break a thick substance, or do similar things, in which there is no great profit whatever from this kind of perfection."<sup>6</sup>

The third is moral perfection, aimed at improving man's character.

"Most of the precepts aim at producing this perfection; but even this kind is only a preparation for another perfection, and is not sought for its own sake. For all moral principles concern the relation of man to his neighbor; the perfection of man's moral principles is, as it were, given to man for the benefit of mankind. Imagine a person being alone, and having no connection whatever with any other person, all his good moral principles are at rest, they are not required, and give man no perfection whatever. These principles are only necessary and useful when man comes in contact with others."<sup>7</sup>

The fourth is metaphysical perfection, which leads to a true knowledge of God.

"With this perfection man has obtained his final object; it gives him true human perfection; it remains to him alone; it gives him immortality, and on its account he is called man. Examine the first three kinds of perfection, you will find that, if you possess them, they are not your property, but the property of others; according to the ordinary view, however, they belong to you and to others. But the last kind of perfection is exclusively yours; no one else owns any part of it. 'They shall be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.' (*Prov.* 5:17) Your aim must therefore be to attain this (fourth) perfection that is exclusively yours, and you ought not to continue to work and weary yourself for that which belongs to others, whilst neglecting your soul till it has lost entirely its original purity through the dominion of the bodily powers over it."<sup>8</sup>

In discussing the problem of evil, Maimonides leaned upon previous philosophers. Evil he regarded as being unreal, metaphysically, for it merely constitutes a privation and an absence of perfection. The so-called evil which we find in the actions of man indicates a lack of wisdom. According to him, we certainly should not believe that evil governs the universe; anyone who holds this opinion is dominated by a partial and inadequate viewpoint. Since evil very often contributes to the perfection of the whole, we must realize, according to Maimonides, that many of the so-called evils are due

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

to our own nature. We are subject to the temptations of the flesh; we cannot resist death; to demand a painless existence would be contrary to the nature of things.

Most evils, Maimonides held, are created by man himself. For example, we acquire lustful habits and thereby weaken our bodies; consequently our health suffers. The wise man moderates his desires and appreciates all the things which God provides. He dedicates himself only to the permanent values of life and shuns everything that is superfluous.

"How many trials and tribulations are due to the lust for superfluous things! In our frantic search for them, we lose even those which are indispensable. For the more we strive after that which is superfluous, the less strength have we left to grasp that which is truly needed.

"Observe how Nature proves the correctness of this assertion. The more necessary a thing is for living beings, the more easily it is found and the cheaper it is; the less necessary it is, the rarer and dearer it is. For example, air, water, and food are indispensable to man. Air is most necessary, for if man is without air a short time he dies, whilst he can be without water a day or two. And is not air more abundant and easily obtained than water? Again, water is more necessary than food, for some people can be four or five days without food, provided they have water. And is not water more abundant everywhere, and cheaper, than food? The same proportion can be noticed in the different kinds of food: that which is more necessary in a certain place exists there in larger quantities and is cheaper than that which is less necessary. No intelligent person, I think, considers musk, amber, rubies, and emeralds as very necessary for man except perhaps as medicines; and they, as well as other like substances, can be replaced for this purpose by herbs and minerals. This shows the kindness of God to his creatures, even to us weak beings."<sup>9</sup>

Maimonides was opposed to any view which makes anthropomorphism the center of religion. Another Jewish philosopher in a later period, Spinoza, spoke even more strongly about the deterministic laws of nature.

Maimonides rejected the belief that all things exist for the sake of man. "On examining this opinion, as intelligent persons ought to examine all different opinions, we will discover that it is erroneous. Those who maintain it may be asked whether God could have

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 12.

created man without those previous creations, or whether man could only have come into existence after the creation of all other things. If they answer in the affirmative, insisting that man could have been created even if, for example, the heavens did not exist, then they must be asked what is the object of all those other things, since they do not exist for their own sake, but for the sake of some thing that could exist without them? Even if the Universe existed for man's sake and man existed for the purpose of serving God, one must still ask: What is the end of serving God? He does not become more perfect if all his creatures serve him. Nor would he lose anything if nothing existed beside him.

"It might perhaps be replied that the service of God is not intended for God's perfection, but for our own. Then, however, the question arises: What is the object of our being perfect?

"Pressing the inquiry as to the purpose of the Creation, we must at last arrive at the answer: It was the will of God. And this is the correct answer. . . . Logic as well as tradition proves clearly that the Universe does not exist for man's sake, but that all things in it exist each for its own sake."<sup>10</sup>

Following Averrhoes, Maimonides insisted that only the active intellect is truly immortal, for it represents the permanent operation of reason. What is transitory and ephemeral perishes with the body. What then is man's task? Maimonides stated categorically that man must seek God, obey the laws, and constantly extend his own wisdom.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the foundations of Moslem religion?
2. What were the main contributions of the Moslems to world civilization?
3. Describe the world-view of Avicenna.
4. What contributions did Averrhoes make to philosophy?
5. Describe the mysticism of Al-Gazzali.
6. How did Maimonides justify his faith in Judaism?
7. How can moral perfection be reached, according to Maimonides?
8. What was the significance of Avicenna in medieval philosophy?
9. How did Halevi view philosophy?
10. Evaluate the spirit of medieval Jewish philosophy.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 13.

## ABELARD AND BERNARD

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### ABELARD'S CAREER

THE conflict between Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux was more than a battle of clashing personalities. They typified the two conflicting viewpoints of the 12th century: the desire for reason *vs.* the unquestioning acceptance of dogmatic truths. But it was mainly Abelard's work which lent such historic interest to the struggle, for Bernard represented simply the traditional ascetic spirit and the reformist tendencies in the Church. Although he was one of the outstanding saints of the Middle Ages, he did not contribute anything original to either the emotional or the intellectual development of the period. On the other hand, Abelard is part of the philosophical renaissance which enlightened the 12th century. His accomplishments tended to give greater prominence to logical thinking and rational investigation of Church dogmas.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting and instructive to follow his career. He was born in 1079 near Nantes of noble parents. His father, Berengar, al-

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of Abelard's achievement see Poole, *Illustrations of medieval thought*, ch. v; Webb, *Studies in the history of natural religion*, Part III, no. 3; Prantl, *Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande*, II, pp. 162-205; McCabe, *Peter Abelard*.



though a feudal lord, exhibited none of the then-prevalent uncivilized habits and coarse manners of his class. Thus, he had his son instructed in letters and encouraged him to pursue a scholarly career. Very early in his life Abelard made up his mind to relinquish his inheritance, since he possessed little proclivity for fighting. In his own words, he "gave up the lure of Mars to be educated in the lap of Minerva."

Abelard was a boy of no more than fifteen or sixteen years when he left his home to obtain a higher education. As a wandering scholar he availed himself of the best teachers in the different educational centers and is reported to have been a student of Roscellinus, one of the most famous dialecticians of his time. This teacher leaned in the direction of nominalism and maintained that universals have no reality apart from particulars. Roscellinus had freely employed reason in the explanation of the Trinity; and this application of reason, in addition to his nominalism, had led him to statements divergent from the official dogma; whereupon he was quickly condemned by a council. From Roscellinus, Abelard learned the fundamentals of logic, but he later showed so little respect for Roscellinus' knowledge that he did not even mention his studies under him in his autobiography, the *Historia calamitatum*.

Arriving in Paris in the full vigor and enthusiasm of his youth, Abelard became a student of the most formidable philosopher of the day—William of Champeaux. The latter enjoyed the reputation of being a veritable pillar of orthodoxy and was considered so brilliant and stimulating a teacher that students from nearly every country flocked to Paris to hear him. As an orthodox churchman, William held, contrary to Roscellinus, that universals exist independent from any material substance, and that the group has a real existence outside of the mind conceiving it and apart from the individuals making it up.

The controversy between the realists, William's followers, and the nominalists, Roscellinus' scholars, aroused considerable attention. Wherever students gathered, the question was assiduously debated; in fact, it became the outstanding intellectual problem of the century.

Abelard plunged into the conflict with all the arrogance of his youth and the brilliance of his debating abilities. Strictly speaking, he was neither a realist nor a nominalist; for him, universals were neither things nor names but simply *concepts*, predicated upon particulars. Although his viewpoint was neither original nor new, it

still constituted a formidable weapon in his hands against the realism of William. Abelard lost no time in attacking the famous teacher. One can imagine the delight of his fellow students and the chagrin of the teacher at hearing day after day his pupil's caustic jibes.

Soon William of Champeaux was forced to retreat from his extreme realism. Students began to lose faith in him. At last, after taking monastic vows, he retired to the bishopric of Châlons-sur-Marne, where he became friendly with Bernard of Clairvaux. He could never forgive Abelard for the humiliation suffered at his hands.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, before this triumph, Abelard had retired from Paris and established himself as a professor at Melun, near Paris, where he taught his subtle philosophy to a large crowd of admirers. So successful was he that in 1115, after he had been denied the right to teach in the cathedral school of Notre Dame at Paris, he taught at St. Geneviève, and students left his rivals to listen to his stimulating lectures.

His health was poor, however, and this condition, together with his filial duty, took him back to Brittany, where he stayed for several years. Later, when he looked back more impartially upon his first academic triumphs, he repented of having incurred the antagonism of William of Champeaux, whom he regarded as one source of his afflictions.

After his return to Paris and St. Geneviève, Abelard found that his scholarly fame had not been eclipsed during his absence. Notwithstanding promising opportunities, he decided to study theology at Laon in order to gain an acquaintance with the "queen of sciences." Possibly his mother, who had become very religious, influenced him. He chose to be instructed by one of the outstanding theologians of his age, Anselm of Laon, who had made Laon a center of theology. But, again, Abelard appeared little impressed by the authority of the master and exhibited the same contumacy as against Roscellinus and William of Champeaux. In taking up theology, Abelard did not discard his logical and progressive mind, so he could scarcely be expected to agree with the conservative Anselm. He ridiculed the master as one who "filled his house with smoke rather than lighting it with the blaze" and compared him in his

<sup>2</sup> Later he championed the theory of *indifferentism*, which tries to mediate between extreme realism and extreme nominalism. It holds that while substance is individual, it possesses at the same time universal properties.

empty eloquence and distrust of reason to a barren tree that is like the "shadow of a mighty name."

Abelard's character is illustrated by an incident which took place at Anselm's school. With his usual tactlessness, he missed classes and thought it unnecessary to attend Anselm's lectures. Besides, he referred to Anselm in uncomplimentary terms. During a dispute with his fellow students, he stoutly maintained that it was superfluous for scholars to have instruction in the Scriptures and boasted that he, the beginner, could lecture upon the most difficult of prophets on but a day's notice. He selected *Ezekiel* as the topic of his lecture and impressed his audience to such an extent by his learning and eloquence that more students were eager to hear him. Anselm's feelings at the phenomenal success of the new student have not been recorded, but he certainly was not willing to tolerate his competition. Abelard voluntarily departed for Paris to resume his teaching, regarding himself as entirely justified in his arrogant behavior.

In Paris, he was offered the chair at Notre Dame. There he reached the zenith of his career. From all over Europe students thronged to Paris to hear master Abelard. They admired him for his extraordinary mind and subtle reasoning, his clear and intriguing lectures which were enlivened by disputes, his use of imagery and frequent quotations from classical authors. Besides these scholarly gifts, he was quite handsome and expressed his ideas in a rich, well-modulated voice. The disputes of the scholars awakened the mental slumber of medieval Europe. Abelard, by his unique gifts, had challenged the imagination of his eager students. They learned from him that scholarship can be a way of life, not reserved for the monk in his solitary cell but open to all who possess an inquiring mind. This movement took place at a time when the feeling of the existence of an *absolute* truth was universal. The young students could be as fanatical and single-minded in their quest for enlightenment as the monk who consecrated his life to the service of God or as the knight who went to conquer Jerusalem.

Then Abelard made an unfortunate step. He fell in love with Heloise, the niece of the canon Fulbert. The canon had placed her under the tutorship of Abelard—a fateful event for both the master and his student. Abelard described Heloise as a girl of remarkable beauty and supreme intelligence. No wonder that both became thoroughly enamored of one another! Later they were married secretly, but Fulbert did not keep the union secret. Consequently,

Abelard put his wife into a convent. This step would, she thought, for all practical purposes undo the marriage and also save the career of her husband. But her uncle took a terrible revenge by hiring ruffians to inflict upon Abelard the most terrible of all mutilations: they deprived him of his manhood.

This event proved to be the turning point of Abelard's career. Not only the physical pain which he suffered, but the shame which he felt influenced his decision. According to old Church laws, his chances for an ecclesiastical career were now lost. In his torment he decided to enter the monastery of St. Denis, and he persuaded Heloise to take the veil at Argenteuil. Henceforth, until his death in 1142, his life was full of suffering, disappointments, and persecutions. Yet his scholarly influence did not wane; students deluged him with petitions to resume his teaching. He consented and instructed a huge gathering at a priory belonging to St. Denis. So great was the deluge of students that many could not be fed or housed, and the neighboring schools suffered a marked loss in attendance.

### ABELARD AND THE CHURCH

By the publication of his *Introduction to theology*,<sup>3</sup> written to bring the light of dialectic into the mystery of the Trinity, Abelard's enemies were given a chance to accuse him of heresy. At the council of Soissons, in 1121, he was condemned, forced to burn the book with his own hands, and sentenced to do penance in a monastery. Soon thereafter, the papal legate reversed the judgment of the council and pronounced Abelard innocent. Hence, he could return to St. Denis.

This time Abelard incurred the wrath of the monks by asserting that Dionysius could not have been the founder of their monastery. Regardless of the truth of his statements, the monks would not believe him, since a loss of revenue and reputation was involved. His life was in jeopardy, and so one night he fled from the monastery to the diocese of Troyes, where he built himself a hermitage and dedicated it to the Holy Ghost.

This action, again, constituted an insult to his enemies, who had taken a stand against his dialectical investigation of the Trinity. It is obvious that the sentence of the council of Soissons had had no visible effect upon him; to the contrary, it had made him more critical and challenging.

<sup>3</sup> His other theological works were *De trinitate* and *Theologia christiana*.

Abelard seized the opportunity to leave the hermitage when he was called to become abbot of St. Gildas in Brittany. Yet his troubles were not ended; St. Gildas needed reform, and he sought to improve the moral condition of the monastery. The monks responded by making several attempts to kill him. In order to save his life, he finally left the monastery and returned to Paris in 1136, where he resumed his teaching.

At this time Bernard became interested in Abelard's writings, because of Abelard's association with Arnold of Brescia, who taught that the Church should go back to the apostolic ways of poverty. He was not the only ecclesiastic intent upon silencing Abelard, but he took the lead in opposing him. At the council of Sens, in 1141, Bernard secured the condemnation of the master dialectician, who was charged by William of Saint Thierry with being "the abuser and not the disciple of the faith; the corrector and not the imitator of the authorized masters."

Abelard did not wait for his final sentence by the council, having decided to appeal to Rome. But he never arrived there; instead, he entered the monastery at Cluny. Here, Peter the Venerable, who disliked Bernard for his criticism of Cluny and for his excessive puritanism, was a more pleasant associate. Besides, Abelard was looked upon as a distinguished guest at Cluny, for he was still considered one of the ablest minds of Europe. In agreeable surroundings he spent his last months in calm meditation, officially reconciled to the Church. He died in 1142.

### ABELARD'S CHARACTER

In a letter of condolence, which was as sincere as it was eloquent, Peter attempted to comfort Heloise by reminding her that she and her husband would be reunited in heaven. Probably Abelard's only happy experience, if one excepts his teachings at Paris after his entrance into St. Denis, arose out of his relationship with Heloise. The hermitage at Troyes, which he left when he became abbot of St. Gildas, he gave to Heloise, who was chosen abbess of a group of nuns.

To her, religion was less important than Abelard; a letter from him proved more valuable than any ecclesiastical office. Her love was self-sacrificing and strong, defying the caprices of fortune. In her letters Heloise claimed that she would rather be his mistress than the wife of an emperor. How she sympathized with him in his many calamities! Seldom have letters unfolded more feeling and

attachment! She confessed that she was constantly blaming God for the injustices inflicted upon Abelard. She was still reliving the days when they had been together.

Abelard's replies to her, however, represent a new facet of his character. He had absorbed a deeply religious feeling and now called her the "spouse of Christ." These letters disclose an Abelard who was not concerned with mundane pleasures but only with the salvation of his soul, who, furthermore, expressed himself as if he were insensible to human feelings. "In my fate I find the working of grace," he wrote to console her, yet probably thereby deepening her agonies. Toward the last, the letters turned to purely religious topics, to the history of the nuns, to hymns and prayers.

Nothing illustrates Abelard's character more vividly than his view of the persecutions he suffered. To him they were, indeed, tragic, and he lived in constant anticipation of new disaster, like a hero in a Greek tragedy. His autobiography was written under the impact of misfortune while he occupied the abbacy of St. Gildas. Of one thing he felt certain—that his enemies were all moved by the basest of motives. In his opinion they were either ignorant, immoral, or envious. Such are the impressions one obtains from his descriptions of William of Champeaux, Anselm of Laon, and Roscelinus. His only comfort lay in recalling the fate of Christ and the example of the apostles. By opposing the errors of his time, he thought he might imitate the example of the saints, hoping finally that everything would work out to the "good of the just." Even in these thoughts and crushed by many misfortunes, Abelard was thoroughly convinced of his own brilliance.

### ABELARD'S BELIEFS

The strange feature of the story of Abelard is that he combated the official heretics of his day as violently as did Bernard. He wrote with vehemence against Tanchelm, who called himself the Son of God, and Peter of Bruys, who was forcing men to be rebaptized and telling them to remove crucifixes and to cease celebrating the mass. But with similar ardor Abelard turned his rebuke against those who thought ignorance in credal matters blessed, relying upon "Amens" as signs of religious devotion, believing, the more readily, dogmas which could neither be understood nor discussed.

It is not surprising to note that Abelard showed no respect for authority. He criticized, disrespectfully, misstatements in the Bible and questioned the infallibility of the prophets and apostles. He

knew that the Church fathers themselves did not agree upon many points of the faith. Therefore he wrote his famous *Sic et non*, containing one hundred and fifty-eight propositions upon which the fathers disagreed. The purpose in his compilation was to incite a quest for truth among his young readers. "For by doubting we come to inquiry, by inquiry we discover the truth." Faith, itself, Abelard called judgment or opinion about things unseen, a definition that scandalized Bernard.

Abelard considered the dogmas of the faith reasonable and reasoning, itself, a noble activity. By reason, Abelard held, man becomes like God and most worthy of his creator; hence reason for the dialectician was the highest activity. Not only the faith, he said, but even the universe obeys the laws of rationality. Yet, there are limits to the application of dialectic in religious disputes. In an earlier theological work Abelard attacked certain Sophists who applied logic in religious disputes without any constructive purposes.

Abelard's religion was far removed from the practices current in the 12th century. He was a bitter enemy of the growing materialism in the Church. As a scholar, he was too sophisticated to believe in crude miracles and to take a deep interest in the crusades and other fanatical enterprises of his contemporaries. Yet even a man of his caliber could not escape some of the limitations of his time. He, also, talked occasionally about the devil and his magic powers.

### ABELARD'S MORAL IDEALS

It would be a serious mistake to regard Abelard merely as a vain professor with a love for disputations and desire for glory. All his life he cherished the ideal of living a philosopher's life. This involved for him very definitely the acceptance of poverty. Heloise had told him that riches and philosophic detachment cannot be combined, and he, himself, had written about such philosophers as the Pythagoreans, who lived in the wilderness in order to escape the luxury of the city. How greatly Abelard admired and idealized the ancient philosophers can be seen in his frequent quotations from their books, even in his discussions of theological questions. He thought that they, too, were saved, and that in many ways they had foretold Christian truths.

In his work the *Dialogue between a philosopher, a Jew and a Christian*, the philosopher seems to have the best of the argument.

Philosophy, Abelard felt, is more in accord with Christianity than with Judaism, but his ideal type of Christianity was a positive moral law rather than a matter of prohibitions and ceremonies, a religion divested of a literal hell and heaven. He maintained that heaven constitutes communion with God, and hell is a separation from God. The dialogue was not completed, but the philosopher finally agrees that the greatest good is not mere virtue but communion with God. Faith triumphs by this concession, although it is a very intellectual faith.

The *Dialogue* formed the climax of Abelard's ideals and showed his high regard for the old philosophers, whose simple lives he contrasted with the immorality of the clergy of his day. In it there are embodied Abelard's tireless application of reason and his incessant quest for a superior spirituality in religion.

### LIFE AND IDEALS OF BERNARD

When we turn from Abelard to Bernard, we are bridging a gap between reason and revelation, between dialectic and contemplative religion. The career of Bernard does not arrest our attention as sharply as that of Abelard. This statement does not mean that Bernard's life was not dramatic and his ideals exceptional, but he embodied best and most adequately the inspirations of the past, while Abelard foresaw the future.<sup>4</sup>

Like the logician Abelard, Bernard was born of knightly parents. His father was a descendant of the counts of Chatillon, while his devout mother claimed relationship with the noble house of Burgundy. Both parents led upright and self-sacrificing lives. The mother, it is reported, was often seen administering to the poor of the neighborhood, caring for the sick and infirm with her own hands. From her, Bernard absorbed such fervent devotion to the religious cause that at twenty-two he entered the monastery of the Cistercians, together with five brothers and twenty-five friends.

In making the choice of the strict order, Bernard resolved to lead an ascetic life with its inevitable privations and innumerable sacrifices. At Cîteaux, the abbot, Stephen Harding, was busily engaged in establishing reforms designed to conform more strictly to the monastic usages of the Benedictine rule. The entrance of the young nobles into the abbey at Cîteaux, in preference to older houses like Cluny, caused the unexpected upswing of the Cistercians; within two years Cîteaux was full to overflowing.

<sup>4</sup> On Bernard see Vacandard, *Vie de St. Bernard, abbé de Clairvaux*, 2 vols.



Scarcely aware of the outer world, Bernard accepted his new profession with intense earnestness and unflinching courage. Like the rest of the monks, he ate the coarsest food, kept the nightly vigils, shaved no more than seven times a year, willingly obeyed the rules of silence, and even devised his own means of self-punishment. So determined was he to shut his eyes to all that disturbed or prevented the realization of his ideals that, it is reported by his biographer, for a year he lived in the hall of the novices without noticing whether the ceiling was vaulted or flat. In later life he rode for an entire day along beautiful Lake Geneva without perceiving the fact. At the same time, he read the Bible painstakingly and, by constant use of the text, acquired an aptness in quoting from it beyond that of any other medieval writer of his day.

We see, then, how in every possible way Bernard surpassed his fellow monks in mortification, learning, and charitable temperament. In less than three years from the time he had entered, he was given charge of twelve monks, many of them older than himself, and instructed to found a daughter monastery. They went into Champagne, and there in a sunny valley near a little river they set up a monastery and called it Clairvaux. Bernard remained abbot of Clairvaux until his death in 1153, although the highest Church offices were offered to him.

At the outset of the new venture, Bernard fell ill and was near death. He never fully recovered his health, and by abstinence, fasts, and vigorous travels he exhausted his frail body. Persuaded by William of Champeaux to preach among the people, he traveled in several countries in an attempt to invigorate the moral tone of secular and ecclesiastical life.

Yet Bernard always turned back to Clairvaux, where he pursued his religious studies. Because of his reputation, novices from the city and country and other monasteries flocked to Clairvaux. He watched over them with anxious eye, being as concerned with their welfare as with the government of the king of France.

### BERNARD'S RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

As counselor and critic of Popes, Bernard attained a unique position in Europe. In 1130 he was called upon to decide between the conflicting claims of two rival Popes, Anacletus and Innocent II; and by throwing his powerful influence behind Innocent II, he decided the issue in favor of the latter. We find that for this purpose Bernard wrote hundreds of letters, made innumerable trips, and pleaded at

councils; but when he had reached his goal, he returned gladly to Clairvaux.

It was Bernard's responsibility to preach the Second Crusade. So responsive was the multitude that vast armies rushed to the Holy Land, though they were unsuccessful in the enterprise. When he preached to the Germans on the proposed crusade, most of his audience could not understand a word of what he was saying, but they were so carried away by his personality that thousands volunteered for the expedition. Not only by sharpness of wit but by appearance, worn out by fasts and vigils as though he had come from another world, Bernard made his audience aware of his idealistic purpose. The people knew about his virtuous life, past deeds, and humility. At Milan they fought to get a piece of his clothing to keep as a relic; and when he came back through the Alps, shepherds came to receive his blessing.

Bernard was convinced that he was sent by God to preach the word. Therefore, everything that went on—the injustices, immorality, lethargy, and negligence of the leaders of man—he regarded as his province; nevertheless, he remained always humble.

### BERNARD AND ABELARD

In contrasting the personalities of Bernard and Abelard, we find that they were opposites in many ways. Fundamentally, Bernard was *introspective* and *mystical* in temperament; Abelard was analytical and inquisitive. The abbot of Clairvaux sought to find an approach to God by contemplation and emotional ecstasies, and he treasured the inner life more highly than outward appearance.

To Abelard, reason was the link with the supernatural. Primarily, he wanted to be successful, to win fame and glory. He had a keen eye for the praise of his contemporaries. Consequently, one is not always convinced of his sincerity. Bernard, on the other hand, possessed a fanatic zeal for the Church. When he entered the cloister, he took along as many of his relatives and friends as possible. He could have obtained almost any ecclesiastical office but he refused, for he wanted to live an ascetic life.

Bernard wrote hundreds of letters in a tone of profound humility, belying his position in the general affairs of Europe. By utter self-abnegation he won his triumphs. How much he enjoyed his power is a question difficult to determine. With poor health, continuous travels must have become an unpleasant burden for him, and an active political life distasteful to his contemplative mind. Ber-

nard's entire life was devoted to the fortunes of the Church, whose interests he advanced with tireless energy.

Abelard was proud and self-reliant and by human knowledge attempted to understand the problems of the day; to be right in scholastic questions became a passion, and those who disagreed with him he regarded as ignorant and jealous. As one reads his *Historia calamitatum*, one is astounded at the unbounded self-esteem of Abelard in his prime. In haughty manner, William of Champeaux and Anselm of Laon are attacked with neither modesty nor poise. His handsome physique contrasted with Bernard's frail, worn-out body "marked by grace, spiritual rather than corporeal." When the two met at the council of Sens, it was an encounter of the representatives of two different worlds; and Bernard, sensing the difference, treated Abelard with vituperative vehemence, although he had previously confessed that he knew little of the issues at stake.<sup>5</sup>

### GILBERT DE LA PORÉE

Like Abelard, Gilbert de la Porée tried to achieve a compromise between extreme realism and extreme nominalism. He was born in 1076 at Poitiers. He taught at Chartres and at Paris; later he became bishop of Poitiers.

De la Porée did not state his philosophy in systematic form, and he lacked the boldness of Abelard. In general, he was interested in synthesizing conflicting viewpoints. Like Boethius, by whom he was influenced, he combined the basic tenets of Platonism and Aristotelianism; but he avoided a Neo-Platonic emphasis and thus did not identify the metaphysical forms with the mind of God.

### JOHN OF SALISBURY

John of Salisbury (c. 1115-1180) even more than Gilbert de la Porée reflected the fundamental spirit of Abelard's system. He received his early education in England and from there proceeded to France, where he studied under the eminent teachers of his time. He achieved ecclesiastical honors and later became bishop of Chartres.

In John of Salisbury the humanistic spirit was dominant. Familiar with classical philosophy, he was independent in his attitude regarding Scholasticism. He made it clear that logic is not an end in itself but is to be cultivated together with other philosophical disciplines.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Meyer, "Die Anklagesätze des Heiligen Bernard gegen Abälard," *Nachrichten der Göttingen Acad.*, 1898, pp. 397-468.

Although he was acquainted with both Skepticism and Epicureanism and gave a rather searching exposition of the two movements, he retained his faith in the Church and believed in the immortality of the soul.

In politics John of Salisbury is known best for his *Polycraticus*, probably the outstanding work on political science in the 12th century. Subordinating kings to the Church, he believed they should exemplify moral perfection. He maintained that an abuse of power should not be tolerated by the people, and thus he favored the killing of tyrants.

### THE ECLECTICS

Peter Lombard and Alananus of Lille contributed no original doctrines to 12th-century philosophy. Peter Lombard is best known for his *Four books of sentences*, which became one of the primary philosophical textbooks of the Middle Ages. He believed that the authority of the Church fathers was to be taken for granted, and thus he did not express any independent opinions.

Alananus of Lille, a Cistercian monk, had more poetic interests than Peter Lombard, but he, likewise, lacked originality. He stressed the power of reason and felt that logic could investigate the mysteries of the faith. In his cosmology he used the Pythagorean principle of numbers and maintained that nature mediates between God and individuals.

### THE PHILOSOPHERS OF CHARTRES

The school of Chartres in the Middle Ages was the center of classical studies and thus favored a humanistic outlook. Bernard of Chartres taught that three substances exist: (1) God, who is absolute and perfect; (2) Ideas, which represent the divine archetypes for the phenomenal world; and (3) matter, which is created by God. He avoided pantheism by showing that God alone is perfect and that the two other substances are relative and derived from God's perfection. In his theory of knowledge he was an extreme realist, believing that Ideas, having an ontological reality in nature, exist prior to individuals.

Theodoric of Chartres exhibited Neo-Platonic and Pythagorean strains in his philosophy, but he remained true to his Christian faith. Interested in science and in classical literary studies, he became one of the outstanding teachers of his time. He maintained that God's essence is transcendent and cannot be comprehended by man's finite

mind. All beings are real, he taught, insofar as they participate in divine perfection. Thus, *pantheistic* strains entered his philosophy.

William of Conches (died 1154) was a student of Bernard of Chartres and especially interested in natural science. He used, in his philosophy, the Atomic hypothesis and was acquainted with the theories of Hippocrates. In his earlier teaching he identified the Holy Ghost with the world-soul. This doctrine was regarded as heresy, and because of the attacks of other scholars he abandoned it.

### ADELARD OF BATH

Adelard of Bath, like William of Conches, was interested in science. He traveled widely in Greece and Asia Minor. He taught at Paris and Laon and translated some of the works of Euclid. In his philosophy influences of Democritus and Pythagoras are evident, as well as Platonic and Augustinian strains. Thus, Adelard stressed the importance of reason and believed intellectual concepts to be innate. His epistemological viewpoint leaned in the direction of indifference.<sup>6</sup> He showed that the soul is immaterial and immortal and, consequently, superior to the body.

### PANTHEISTIC HERETICS

Pantheists, such as Bernard of Tours, Amalric of Bène, and David of Dinant, played a prominent role in shaking the faith of the Scholastics. Bernard of Tours represents a pantheistic tendency in the *De mundi universitate*, a metaphysical poem which is extremely subtle. He believed in the existence of a world-soul, which he interpreted in a Neo-Platonic manner. Unlike the orthodox Scholastics, he accepted the reality of emanation. Consequently, he did not accept the doctrine of personal creation. In his epistemological concepts he adhered to *extreme realism*. Thus he neglected individual beings and emphasized the importance of universal essences.

Amalric, a teacher at Paris, asserted that man and God are identical and that God can be found everywhere. Thus, there is only one substance: God and his perfection is the standard of all knowledge.

David of Dinant was condemned in 1210 for being heretical. He taught a doctrine of pantheistic materialism, for he asserted that God and prime matter are identical. We find almost *Eleatic* strains in his system, for he maintained that the world of the senses is illusory. The diversity of nature, time, change, and motion thus are not real;

<sup>6</sup>This view was also accepted by Walter of Mortagne and William of Champeaux.

there is only one substance, which is eternal and material rather than immaterial, as the orthodox Scholastics maintained.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Relate the principal events of Abelard's life.
2. Describe Abelard's method of doubt.
3. Why did Abelard oppose William of Champeaux?
4. What were Abelard's ethical views?
5. What is the significance of the *Sic et non*?
6. Why did Bernard attack Abelard?
7. Discuss the contributions of the pantheists to 12th-century thought.
8. What is the significance of John of Salisbury?
9. What were the main philosophical problems of the 12th century?

## THE MYSTICS

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### SIGNIFICANCE

**I**n order to understand the philosophical conflict of the Middle Ages it is necessary to discuss the mystic spirit of medieval religion. Mysticism can be defined as an intuitive quest for a union with the principle of reality. The stages of this experience are usually divided into (1) purgation, (2) illumination, and (3) union. Mysticism played an important role in medieval Judaism and Moham-medanism. Fundamentally, it symbolized the prevailing preoccupation with the supernatural realm. We can find mystic strains in nearly all the prominent medieval Christian thinkers.

Several weak points are noticeable in the medieval mystics. Many of their prophecies and visions had a pathological foundation and were products of overburdened or perverted minds. Furthermore, mysticism was connected with the habit of thinking in allegory, so prevalent in this period.

The Middle Ages found a mystical medium in numbers. Augustine had regarded numbers as constituting the thoughts of God, and, therefore, in the Middle Ages the science of numbers tended to become the science of the universe itself. By the 12th century a

systematized form of numerology, often founded on Scriptural references, had grown up. For example, twelve was the symbol of the Church; therefore, it was said, Christ chose twelve apostles. It was thought significant that twelve is the product of three and four. Three constituted the symbol of the Holy Trinity and signified spiritual matters, while four stood for the four elements and referred to material things. According to this science of numbers, when three is multiplied by four spirit and matter form a unity and are crystallized in the revelation of the Christian Church, represented by the twelve apostles.

Another example is the number seven, which stands for man. Since four plus three are seven, man is composed of both matter and spirit. We find this number seven in the seven ages into which human life is said to fall; in the seven virtues and seven deadly sins; in the seven sacraments; and in the seven tones in which the Church offered praise in its daily ritual; and, finally, in the seven days in which the world was supposedly created.

This sense of the mystical efficacy of numbers permeates nearly all the great works of the Middle Ages. The great *summae* are examples of it in the division of their subject matter. Their connection with symbolism suggests the obsession of medieval thought with analogies, for if we examine the mystical numbers, such as seven, we see that they are not based upon rational thought but upon analogies. The latter tended to emphasize the unitary aspects of medieval civilization, so that the mystics could find fundamental similarities on all levels of existence.

### THE MYSTIC SPIRIT

Commonly it is assumed that the mystic is one who turns away from the affairs of the crowd and takes no interest in the general conditions of his time. This idea is mistaken if we intend to apply it to the medieval protagonists of a contemplative life. Hugo of St. Victor, St. Francis, and Jacopone da Todi, to mention a few, all intended to share their experiences with others. They were engaged in the enlightenment of the secular leaders. They did not ignore the sins of mankind and the imperfection of the social institutions of their day.

The approaches taken by the mystics differed markedly. Some mystics were scholarly, like Hugo of St. Victor; others were emotional, like Elizabeth of Schönau. They came from all classes of society and had different attitudes toward life. But they were alike



in their steady belief that material goods and dependence upon social approval cannot be combined with a contemplative life and that their experiences were real, guiding them to the *Truth*. Generally, they all subordinated intellectual knowledge to the action of the emotions. They sought for a higher sphere of religion, where rational knowledge would not be sufficient, for the completion of the mystic experience brought about a childlike feeling of innocence and purity.

The mystic starts with an increasing attention to his own personality and is at first conscious only of himself and the goal which he wants to attain. He aims at the absorption of his self into a larger whole. Intellectually, this endeavor signifies that a heroic attempt is being made to see the problems of the world from the inside, to obtain a knowledge of the essential workings of nature through identification with it.

Characteristic of the mystic spirit of the Middle Ages was the ardent emotional temperament displayed by a group of nuns—Elizabeth of Schönau, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Gertrude the Great. These women, through intense spiritual love, expected to be united with God. They were not indifferent to nature, or to the sufferings of humanity, or to ornaments—all age-old subjects of feminine interests. Gertrude reported that once Jesus, when she invoked his name, “impressed upon the lips of her soul, so to speak, a kiss the sweetness of which surpassed that of honey beyond compare.” Her passionate relationship with God was crystallized in the symbol of the “Sacred Heart.” These nuns understood the divine according to the human elements of their faith.

### THE SCHOOL OF ST. VICTOR

On the other hand, Hugo of St. Victor’s mysticism rested upon solid theological foundations. He was a prior of the school of St. Victor, which had been founded by William of Champeaux, first the teacher and then the most ardent opponent of Abelard. Hugo of St. Victor’s teachings were synthesized by Richard (died 1173), who succeeded him. Adam of St. Victor was the mystical poet of the school and composed some outstanding religious hymns.

Hugo of St. Victor had none of Bernard’s distrust of Scholasticism and reason. Thus his theories about the mystic stages of contemplation are methodical, and in *De sacramentis*, a treatise on sacraments, he became a forerunner of the precise method of 13th-century Scholasticism. The most famous of Hugo’s theories regarding the

stages of the mind in apprehending the supernatural—*cogitatio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*—expresses the experiences which every mystic has to pass through. *Cogitatio* is the perception of things through the senses; *meditatio* is an inquiry into the veiled meaning of life and nature; and *contemplatio* is the insight which is thus achieved regarding the substance of reality.

Hugo of St. Victor possessed the rare gift of clarity in setting forth his ideas. In faith he distinguished between two component factors, knowledge and affection. Affection he valued the more highly, since thereby the will turns away from mundane pleasures to God. In his ideal of affection lies the germ of Schleiermacher's "emotion."<sup>1</sup>

Richard of St. Victor was praised by Dante in the *Paradiso* as a scholar "who was in contemplation more than man." Like Hugo of St. Victor, he disliked mere academic knowledge but found a niche for reason in mysticism. The highest stage of contemplation involved, for Richard, an utter alienation of the mind, a loss of one's own consciousness, "when all is one and one is all," with a resulting feeling of ecstasy.

### FRANCIS OF ASSISI

More significant than Richard of St. Victor was Francis, who was born in Assisi about 1182. As the son of Pietro di Bernardone, a wealthy cloth merchant, Francis turned against everything that was cherished and prized by his family. At his death in 1226 his glory consisted mainly in having despised worldly goods and having faithfully kept his vows to "Lady Poverty."

The picture we receive of Francis' early manhood before his conversion is of a young aristocrat, fond of amusements, gaiety, and good company. Endowed with a sparkling temperament, he had a great capacity for enjoyment. And so, as the leader of an easy-going band of young men who spent much of their leisure time in feasting and reveling, Francis developed expensive habits. Although his father, Pietro, was quite prosperous, such extravagance did not please him; but, since it elevated his social status and brought aristocrats to his home, he was not too harsh with his son. Already, in this early stage of his life, Francis craved to be the best; he wanted to be the noblest knight, admired by all. In order that all might know his aspirations, he wore the most sumptuous clothes and the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stöckl, *Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, II, pp. 309-367.

finest armor. When held captive for twelve months after a combat with the citizens of Perugia, he did not lose his cheerfulness and optimism. He never doubted that he would be a great baron one day, "that the day would come when he would be adored by the whole world."

After returning from captivity, he fell ill and as a consequence experienced a decisive inner crisis. Thus, around 1204 he was started on the way to conversion by a growing sympathy with the sufferings of humanity. Francis' religious mission lay not in ascetic retirement, in fleeing from the evils of his day, but in compassion for the oppressed. At first, he wanted to continue on his former path, to feast and to fight knightly combats, but soon this no longer satisfied him.

After a long banquet, it is said, where he as always was proclaimed king of the revelers, Francis was found by his companions absorbed in deep thought, unconscious of all that was going on around him. When asked about it, somebody shouted that Francis was probably thinking about taking a wife. Then he exclaimed with gusto: "I am thinking of taking a wife more beautiful, more rich, more pure than you could ever imagine."

The symbol of his moral transformation was his compassion for the leper, the most unfortunate of the social outcasts of the Middle Ages. According to Bonaventura, his official biographer, while Francis was riding one day he accidentally met a leper, who at first filled him with loathing. But then he leapt from his horse and embraced him. "When the leper stretched forth his hand as though to receive alms, he kissed it, and then put money therein."

Francis had won a victory over himself. His human sympathies had triumphed over his esthetic sense of beauty. Could there be any creature more disgusting to him than a leper? Imagine Francis, the handsome knight, imbued with chivalric notions and the romantic tales of the troubadours, being confronted by this spectacle of disease and lowliness. His illness, however, had shown him his own impotence and the emptiness of his romantic dreams. He had learned that military prowess and bodily strength are superficial and evanescent things. Experience had taught him that human life is solitary and vain without a measure of kindness and compassion. The encounter with the leper, a pilgrimage to Rome, where he borrowed the rags of a beggar to plead for alms for a whole day, his experiences before the crucifix at St. Damian—all were signs of religious awakening.

Francis decided to rebuild the chapel of St. Damian, which was falling into ruin. He neglected his appearance and spent whole days in seclusion. When he sold his father's goods to repair the little chapel, his father attempted to restrain him by force and call him before the magistrates. But Francis requested that his case be decided in the bishop's court. In the presence of a large crowd the bishop advised Francis to give up all his property. He complied willingly, and dramatically returned his father's goods to him. A hair shirt and a cloak which he obtained from a servant of the bishop of Assisi were enough for him. Even this habit was stolen from him, but he felt happy for having thus consummated his strange nuptials with "Lady Poverty."

Francis, conscious of his change of allegiance, knew that he could not belong to one family or to one city; his was now a universal mission. He showed no eagerness to join the crowds of Cluniacs or Cistercians or other organized monks; he wanted to follow a new path to satisfy his longing for liberty. And so from 1209, the year when he started out to preach, following the example of the apostles, "wearing neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff," the vision of his task expanded. The decade which followed was filled with ceaseless activity.

Soon disciples attached themselves to him. Their first settlement was a little hut near a leper hospital. They drew up a simple rule embodying the teachings of Christ and set out for Rome to obtain its sanction from Pope Innocent III. After some hesitation, the Pope gave his verbal assent to the rule. Francis and his followers called themselves the *minores*, or poor folk, to indicate their humble station in life.

The foundation was laid for a second order of Franciscans by Lady Clare, who was so deeply impressed by one of Francis' sermons that she left her rich home to found the sisterhood of the "Poor Clares" at St. Damian. This she governed for forty years, true to the ideals of Francis.

The order expanded in other directions. It organized missions and opened its doors to laymen. It was called, at first, the "Order of Continents or Penitents" and received those who vowed to live in peace and charity.

Francis was tireless in his preachings. The sincerity of his sermons and the appeal of his personality converted whole communities. Wherever he went it was the same; the pent-up enthusiasms of Europe were let loose. Men of wealth renounced their posses-

sions that they might live among lepers—"God's patients," as Francis called them—and wash their sores. The scholar abandoned his books in order to achieve salvation.

Francis wanted to convert the infidels or, in case of failure, to find martyrdom. Between 1212 and 1215 he tried to go to Spain and to Palestine but failed to reach either destination. In 1219, however, he embarked for Egypt, where the crusaders were besieging Damietta. There he was captured, and martyrdom seemed certain for him. But when he was brought before the sultan, he preached the Gospel. The monarch did not know how to deal with him, and so he was allowed to return to the Christian camp, from which he continued on his way to Palestine.

When he returned to Italy in 1220, his order was faced with grave problems. He had previously been forced to face difficult tasks arising out of the expansion of his order. A lax interpretation of the rules had crept in. Such a condition was unavoidable in a growing religious group, but Francis did not intend to be the nominal leader of an organization which was not true to his ideals, and so he gave up his position as the head of the order. In the fall of 1220 he became a private brother and humbly pledged his allegiance to the new minister-general.

Francis had finished his official work for the order, except for his help in the composition of a new Rule which was adopted in 1223. He had to compromise a great deal with those who insisted on less severe restrictions and more careful provisions for the organization of the order. To some extent, he felt that his work had been a failure since he had not succeeded in converting the infidels and had failed to maintain the purity of his followers. Yet, during the last years of his life, when his eyesight was weakening and sickness was plaguing his body, his faith in Christ was renewed by his mystic experiences on Mount Alverno, where he felt the *stigmata*, the imprint of Christ's wounds upon his body.

In this experience, Francis found new strength and conviction that the kingdom of heaven would be opened to him. To his order he was a fatherly adviser who had already set his eyes on another world. The vision of the Beyond gave him a sense of quietude and serenity. The Franciscan brothers around him were filled with awe at his perseverance and talked about his miraculous powers. It seemed as if the "Little Man" of Assisi had become the center of the religious universe. He was quite unafraid of death. According to Thomas of Celano, he welcomed "Sister Death" with a song.

True to his ideals, even in his last hour, he was stripped of his clothing and laid on the bare ground. This was his last impressive gesture to "Lady Poverty."

### ST. FRANCIS AND HIS AGE

St. Francis responded to the immediate challenge of his age. His work and his ideals were conditioned by the religious situation of his time. The reform of Pope Gregory VII and the influence of the Cistercian order and other regenerated monasteries had not been lasting and enduring. Simony, incontinence, and the exactions of the Church courts continued, and many bishops regarded the priestly office as a feudal fief and themselves as secular officeholders.

From all sides criticism was heaped upon the religious institutions. Bernard lashed the simoniacs and the incontinent priests with a vehemence not even surpassed by the heretics. The chaplain of Henry II of England called "the clerics worse than the pagans" and pictured the organization of the curia as one in which bribery and corruption abounded. Satire was used to describe the immorality of the clerics in the romances of *Reynard the fox*, who, when faced with death, thought little about confession and called the churchmen "hypocrites."

In the 12th century paganism had made rapid progress in the south of France—a paganism motivated by unquenchable lust for life, which found its best expression in *Aucassin et Nicolette*. Aucassin's love for the beautiful Nicolette was so great that even the prospect of hell did not discourage him. On the contrary, he did not want to go to heaven, "for there are the old priests and cripples." This unfettered spirit of rebellion was not confined to the nobles. It likewise affected the common man and the theologians, who all desired an effective reform in the moral conduct of the religious leaders. Heretical sects like the Waldensians and the Albigensians were springing up to emphasize the need for poverty.

### THE WALDENSIA NS

The Waldensians were named for Waldo, a rich merchant of Lyons. According to reliable accounts, he was a successful businessman before he became inspired by a jongleur's recital of the deeds of St. Alexis, when he resolved, suddenly, to follow in the footsteps of the saint. Consequently, he divided his property, giving part to his wife,

providing for his daughter, and distributing the rest to the poor. So complete was his abandonment of all property that he had to beg for food from an acquaintance, whereupon his wife appealed to the archbishop of Lyons, who ordered him to accept food from her. Soon Waldo had a crowd of followers, who brought the Bible into the layman's home. They adopted a special costume and were called the "Poor Men of Lyons."

Representative of Waldo's burning zeal was his endeavor to study and understand the Bible. He paid some priests to translate it into the vernacular, so that he could learn many passages by heart. It seems evident that the leaders of the movement were quite ignorant of theological points, a fact which caused cultured churchmen a great deal of amusement. When Waldo's followers sought permission to preach from two different Popes and from the Lateran council in 1179, they were flatly refused. These decisions were based on the opposition and disloyalty of the Waldensians, but the main Waldensian doctrines also were incompatible with Church dogmas. This group maintained that God is to be obeyed rather than men, that laymen and even women have the right to preach, and that masses for the dead are useless.

As the break with the orthodox tradition became inevitable, the Waldensians adopted a new historical interpretation, which stated that after the time of Sylvester II (Pope, 999-1003) the Christian faith had become corrupt and that Waldo was the inheritor of the apostolic tradition.

The "Poor Men of Lyons" stressed the moral aspects of life and prohibited killing, swearing, and lying as mortal sins. As antisacerdotalists, without any elaborate organization, they became dangerous foes of the Church, and the rapid development of their teachings through Avignon, Savoy, Bohemia, and Pomerania bears testimony to their popularity. Even the persecutors of the Waldensians paid tribute to their courage and puritanism.

The Church faced opposition from another sect even more radical in their tenets, a sect of ancient lineage. Augustine, as we have seen, had already combated the Manichaeans after he had been converted to the Christian faith, but neither he nor cruel persecutions were successful in stamping out the followers of Mani. From the East, the doctrines of the Manichaeans were spread to Europe, appearing in Italy, France, the Low Countries, and Germany. At the end of the 12th century the Manichaeans had a large following in southern France, where they were known as Albigensians.

Christ, for the Albigensians, existed merely as the highest angel, whose crucifixion had no spiritual meaning. From the Orient the Albigensians adopted belief in the transmigration of souls and the worthiness of suicide. Life on earth, for them, constituted an ordeal and a preparation for paradise.

They condemned marriage in general and encouraged a celibate life, but only the leaders of the faith were obliged to shun marriage. With this asceticism they combined various food prohibitions. Cheese, milk, meat, and eggs were on their forbidden list. They claimed that human life is sacred, that one should not swear or lie, and that the sacraments are useless. An inquisitor described their beliefs in the following ways:

"Then they attack and vituperate, one after the other, all the sacraments of the church, especially the sacrament of the Eucharist, saying that it cannot contain the body of Christ, for had this been as great as the largest mountain Christians would have consumed it entirely before this. . . . Of baptism, they assert that water is material and corruptible, and is therefore the creation of the Evil Power and cannot sanctify the soul, but that the churchmen sell this water out of avarice, just as they sell earth for the burial of the dead, and oil to the sick when they anoint them, and as they sell the confession of sins as made to the priests. Hence, they claim that confession made to the priests of the Roman Church is useless, and that, since the priests may be sinners, they can not loose nor bind, and being unclean themselves, can not make another clean. They assert, moreover, that the Cross of Christ should not be adored or venerated. . . . They proclaim many other scandalous things in regard to the sacraments. They, moreover, read from the Gospels and the Epistles in the vulgar tongue, applying and expounding them in their favor and against the condition of the Roman Church in a manner which it would take too long to describe in detail, but all that relates to this subject may be read more fully in the books they have written and infected, and may be learned from the confessions of such of their followers as have been converted."<sup>2</sup>

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ST. FRANCIS

Francis was influenced by these movements. Even the organization of his Tertiaries had not been without precedents, for the "Humil-

<sup>2</sup> Bernard of Gui, *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis*, v, 1, 4 (Webster, *Historical selections*, p. 433).



ciati," a somewhat similar group, had been founded as early as the 12th century. But the unique contribution of the Franciscans was their intense enthusiasm for poverty.

The life of Francis was full of dramatic and colorful happenings which taught his followers the essential wickedness of money and property. He inspired them "to flee it like the devil." He had no hatred for rich people, however. He hated material possessions not for themselves but for the attitude they created in society. "If we possessed property," he told the bishop of Assisi, "we should have need of arms for its defense, for it is the source of quarrels and lawsuits." This idea did not mean that the Franciscans could idle and live a life of laziness. On the contrary, they had to work hard and assiduously.

The touch of vehemence and the extravagance in his injunctions against property reveal how important this problem was for him. He knew that the moral corruption and the depravity which he was attempting to correct were due largely to material possessions, which created a certain attitude incompatible with genuine religious devotion. In the prosperous communities of Italy he could clearly see the religious indifference and the skepticism of the growing merchant class.

The compassion which Francis felt for the poor is the most illuminating feature of his character. He possessed a unique sensibility to the misfortunes of others, and he wanted to be one with all unfortunate creatures on earth. Only in this way could he appreciate and feel the agony of Christ.

Characteristic of Francis was his humility. In spite of his religious inspiration and the world-wide influence of his order, he remained to his dying hour "little Brother Francis, the least of your servants." He typified the medieval attitude of exhibiting the insignificance of one's achievement. Undoubtedly, it was not just feigned in his case. It was his conviction that God blessed most the lowly and the humble. In his own order he never expected excessive praise or any special privileges. He had little use for the man of knowledge who relied upon it to solve the riddles of the universe and dared to scrutinize the mysteries of the faith.

If Francis, himself, had acquired an elaborate scholastic education, and if he had attended the universities, he could not have found so simple an ideal. This lack of formal schooling saved him from a sophisticated attitude and made his heart more responsive to the call of God.

## JOACHIM OF FLORIS

Also important in shaping contemplative religion was Joachim of Floris (died 1202).<sup>3</sup> The son of a nobleman, he lived a very agreeable life until he started on a long tour to the East with a crowd of friends and retainers. When he arrived at Constantinople he was confronted with the ghastly specter of the plague and witnessed dire tribulations, which deeply impressed him. One can imagine how guilty the sensitive Joachim, who was neither superficial nor entirely selfish, felt for his pomp and pride amidst appalling human misery. He sent back all his retainers but one and set out as a humble penitent and pilgrim, clad in a shabby tunic, to visit the Holy Land.

With this decision, Joachim the ascetic had triumphed over Joachim the knight; his whole life from this time on became a model of charity. It is reported that he gave his garments to some destitute Saracen, and that as a monk in the abbey of Corazzo he excelled all in obedience and rigorous mortifications. Although he experienced rapid advancement in his monastic profession, he preferred the quietude of the wilderness to the rigorous duties connected with the abbotship of Corazzo.

With the permission of Pope Lucius III, he subsequently retired to a hermitage, where he spent the last years of his life. But, like other hermits, he was soon summoned by faithful followers to become, against his wish, the head of a new order whose rule was approved by Pope Celestine III in 1196. So devoted was he to the ideal of poverty that he once gave all his clothes away in order to help the victims of a famine which had devastated vast regions of Sicily in 1201.

At all times Joachim delighted in attending the sick and the poor. It was his habit to wash with his own hands the floor of the infirmary. Moreover, by his power of persuasion he saved many towns from the brutality of Henry VI, the German king. In his social service he made no distinction between Christian and infidel, trying to convert the latter by example rather than by preaching.

It was as a visionary, however, that Joachim left the greatest imprint upon the medieval world. Luke, his biographer, asserted that Joachim was in direct contact with Christ and related that he fulfilled the office of mass with a "joy and happiness that gave him an angelic countenance." Fasts and nightly vigils could not wear Joachim out; on the contrary, he became more elated with his self-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Sedgwick, *Italy in the thirteenth century*, vol. 1.

imposed sacrifices. He possessed the gift of inspiring his listeners with sermons based on his visions. When delivering a sermon, he usually started in a low, scarcely audible voice, which progressed in volume until it resounded like thunder and struck the listeners with its torrential eloquence.

One of Joachim's earliest visions relates how near to death he was in a desert, where he could find no water. Finally, he saw a man standing near a river and heard him say, "Drink of this stream." He obeyed, and when he awoke, although he had previously been illiterate, he now had absorbed a profound knowledge of the Bible. Kings and nobles visited him, among them Richard of England and Philip Augustus of France, who had heard of his miraculous experiences and desired to know whether the crusade they were planning would be successful.

In his writings Joachim dealt with theological topics, attacking Peter Lombard's exposition of the Trinity; he also wrote against the adversaries of the Christian faith. But his revolutionary doctrines are contained in three works: a concordance, a psalter, and a commentary on the *Book of revelation*. In these works, Joachim divided the history of humanity into three stages: *the first under the rule of the Father, which lasted until the birth of Christ; the second under the rule of the Son; and the third under the rule of the Holy Ghost*. Thus Joachim, aware of the insufficiency and failure of religion in his day, did not end the fulfillment of history with the introduction of the New Testament but with the reign of contemplative religion. He had already announced that there were dark days ahead for the Church, for the old Benedictine purity was being neglected to the disadvantage of all believers.

In his writings Joachim predicted that in the last generation there would be terrible tribulations with the reign of Anti-Christ, when sacrifices would be of no avail and man would have to endure more persecutions and misfortunes than ever before. He thought this period would be short, for, otherwise, man would perish. After it, he continued, true religion will rise to give peace and unity to the people, who will all unite in the praise of God. In this final stage, through the help of the monastic orders, mankind will be converted to the contemplative life.

It seems clear that Joachim wrote as a hermit with a hermit's world-view. For him, as for countless ascetics, the rule of the secular clergy had failed to bring about a utopian condition; and he censured them relentlessly for their avarice and greed, a view which

made him even doubt that they could be saved. According to him, a purified and elevated monasticism would finally be triumphant, for the rule of the Holy Ghost would be filled with peace, love, and liberty.

Joachim's ideas were not far from the radical type of pantheism advocated by Amalric of Bène, a thinker who saw the human being as part of God. While Joachim of Floris was not a revolutionary, his followers took the prophecies of the saint literally and speculated on such items as the nature of the Anti-Christ and the beginning of his savage rule. Many were absolutely convinced that Frederick II, the skeptic opponent of the papacy, was actually Anti-Christ. With fearful anticipation some Christians looked forward to the year 1260, which was to start Anti-Christ's reign.

One party of Franciscans, who believed in the primitive rule of Francis and in absolute adherence to poverty, found the writings of Joachim much to their liking. Since they were convinced that Francis had brought about a complete revolution in religious worship but had not been followed by the majority of his order, they believed themselves destined to reform humanity. Joachim of Floris was adopted as the father of these "Spiritual Franciscans" when there appeared, in 1254, a book called *Introduction to the eternal gospel*. It is an edition of Joachim's three most important works together with an elaborate introduction and commentaries. In it Gerard, the editor, delineated the ideas of the prophet and fashioned them to his own purpose. He asserted that as early as 1200 the spirit of life had departed from the Old and the New Testament and that it dwelt from this time on in the *Eternal gospel*, which was to be a guide for the rule of the Holy Ghost just as the New Testament had been a guide for the generations from Christ to Joachim of Floris.

In actual substance there is little difference between Joachim and his commentator, but there is a sharp disagreement in spirit. Joachim viewed the problems of the Church in a constructive way, while his commentator wrote as an acrimonious critic, whose ideal was to remould the entire Christian organization according to the early Franciscan movement.

### JACOPONE DA TODI

One of the "Spiritual Franciscans" was Jacopone da Todi, who combined in his mysticism the teachings of Joachim of Floris and of Francis. In reading Jacopone's life story, we realize that he was not

just a model character but a man with human sympathies and penetrating criticism of his own and other people's failings.

Although we possess little authentic material about his life, we know that he came from a noble family and exhibited extravagant tastes and wild aspirations in his youth, giving few thoughts to political or religious principles. At forty he was a successful lawyer, not too scrupulous in his practice but a man with a commanding voice in the affairs of his community. In him, artistic and sensual traits were intermingled. He was fond of poetry, music, and the company of beautiful women.

According to legend, the turning point in Jacopone da Todi's life came when his young wife was killed in the collapse of a platform at a marriage festival. Shocked by her death, he was deeply moved when he found beneath her splendid attire the rough shirt of a penitent. The discovery completely changed his own outlook upon life, and he decided to turn his thoughts to his own salvation. He gave away his property and joined the Third Order of St. Francis. After his conversion, Jacopone determined to follow Francis in his most ascetic practices. This resolve involved a complete transformation of his character. He liked to show himself as "God's fool." People thought him insane because he was so eccentric.

During his first period in the Franciscan Order, lasting about ten years, Jacopone was a Tertiary wandering about Italy and preaching to the people with intense fervor and imaginative style. In 1278, however, he sought permission to enter a monastery of the friars at Todi, and, since they lived under relaxed rules, they showed some hesitation but finally accepted him. Nevertheless, he continued to be one of the most prominent adherents to the "Spiritual" faction, as can be seen by his participation in a rebellion against Pope Boniface VIII. Consequently, he was thrown into prison on orders of Boniface and not released until the Pope's death in 1303. After his release from jail he experienced three more peaceful years before he died in 1306.

Jacopone's life in the Franciscan Order can be divided into three stages, according to his respective mystical experiences: first, his "wander years" until about 1278, corresponding to purgation; second, his stay in the monastery and political experiences until 1303, the period of illumination; and finally, his last three years, a period of creative union.

The first period of his mystic life begins with his abandonment of material goods and growing distrust of learning—a feeling he shared

in common with the founder of the Franciscan movement. So absorbed was he in his past shortcomings that he longed for death and wished disease would take him away. An intense inferiority feeling produced morbid strains in his character. He saw the existence of man as a succession of endless miseries. We have to view Jacopone as one who was literally mad for Christ, as a revivalist who inspired his audiences with dark visions. He was imbued with a glowing desire for union with God and expressed himself in incoherent songs. However, his sacrifices were not complete, for there were occasions when he craved sanctity, and he knew that desire for social approval stood in the way of his spiritual perfection.

Hence, he took a step toward the utter renunciation of his will and reached the second stage in his mystic experiences, illumination, by becoming a lay brother in the monastery. For him, it resulted in subordination to discipline and strict obedience to his superiors. Yet he was not blind to the ambitions of the monks, to their thirst for riches and learning and a saintly reputation. As a conformist to a puritanical mode of worship with a predilection towards squalor and filth, he was not pleasant company for the more sophisticated friars. The grievances in a monastery, he learned, can be just as disturbing as the contempt of the masses.

In this transitional period Jacopone began to comprehend the power of *tears*, a sign of heightening emotional intensity accompanied by self-criticism. He prayed for death. Furthermore, he was tortured by fantastic visions and painful headaches. Only by centering his mind on God could he weather these emotional storms. Symbolic of his mood is one of his most intense poems:

“Before I knew its power, I asked in prayer  
 For love of Christ, believing it was sweet;  
 I thought to breathe a calm and tranquil air,  
 On peaceful heights where tempests never beat.  
 Torment I find instead of sweetness there.  
 My heart is riven by the dreadful heat;  
 Of these strange things to treat  
 All words are vain;  
 By bliss I am slain,  
 And yet I live and move.

. . . . .

Now on no creature can I turn my sight,  
 But on my Maker all my mind is set;

Earth, sea, and sky are emptied of delight,  
 For Christ's dear love all else I clean forget:  
 All else seems vile, day seems as dark as night;  
 Cherubim, seraphim, in whom are met  
 Wisdom and Love, must yet  
 Give place, give place,  
 To that one Face  
 To my dear Lord of Love."<sup>4</sup>

Finally Jacopone was rewarded by an overflowing of bliss, the gift of "a double life," and he felt "so fierce the fire of love." He was a new creature and wrote: "I in Christ am born." He yearned for the same kind of devotion as Dante felt when he first met Beatrice; it is a fierce devotion, satisfied only by complete union. Thus the last stage in his mystical religion led to a full union with God, where Jacopone found measureless and endless light.

### PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCE OF THE MYSTICS

The mystics played a most important role in philosophy. Although many of them, like Francis, had little interest in intellectual matters, their attitude produced a basic change in medieval thinking:

(1) They contributed a strain of *individualism*. Against the absolutism of ecclesiastical organization they asserted the dignity and potentiality of the individual. Less concerned with ritual, they dealt mainly with man's inward spiritual experience. Above all, they emphasized the need for *personal* salvation and for a personal awareness of God.

(2) The mystics influenced the reaction against reliance upon formal logic. Since they stressed faith, they felt that reason represents a lower category of knowledge. They declared that salvation cannot be gained by dependence on secular learning but that a real religious experience is necessary.

(3) The mystics gave an impetus to *pantheism*. Although most of them were loyal to the Church, they often tended to disregard the distance between God and man and showed how man contains the spark of divinity. To them, the universe represented a complete unity. Thus they did not accept the diversity and phenomenal changes which the senses picture.

<sup>4</sup> *Lauda* 90, quoted in Underhill, *Mystics of the church*, p. 97.

(4) In their epistemology they leaned in the direction of intuitionism. Hence, the followers of St. Francis upheld the reality of divine illumination, which can be understood only through insight and intuition. In modern times intuitionism has made for irrationalism (as exemplified in the philosophy of Bergson and Schopenhauer). In the Middle Ages it was different, for to the mystics the divine light represented absolute perfection and indicated that complete certainty can be achieved by man.

#### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did the mystic spirit flourish in the Middle Ages?
2. Explain the importance of mysticism in the Middle Ages.
3. What were the contributions of Hugo of St. Victor to medieval mysticism?
4. How did Francis express the ideals of Christianity?
5. What was Joachim of Floris' philosophy of history?
6. Explain the doctrines of the Waldensians.
7. In what ways were the Albigensians heretics?
8. What contributions did the mystics make to philosophy?
9. What were the weaknesses of the mystical spirit?
10. Why was the Church suspicious of mysticism?



# THE PROGRESS OF SCHOLASTICISM

. . . . .

## EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION

**T**he reaction against mysticism was strongest in the universities, which stressed the ideals of reason. The term university itself possessed a meaning in the Middle Ages different from that of today. It was taken from the Roman law and applied to any corporate group such as trade guilds, the municipalities, the various benefit societies, and the monastic knights. In its formal organization, the medieval university imitated the craft guilds in their system of apprentices, journeymen, and masters, and possessed, at the height of its growth, the same pageantry and adherence to definite stages of promotion as the guilds. However, many medieval documents refer to the university proper as a "general center of studies," a *studium generale*. Such a center of studies needed no endowment, no campus, and no athletic program; all that was necessary was a group of students eager to learn and a number of teachers anxious to teach. Nevertheless, the idea of a corporation suggested by the term university describes accurately its structural development in the Middle Ages.

Two universities particularly exemplify the prevalent form of academic organization: Bologna and Paris. At Bologna, Irnerius, who was the first notable student of the Justinian Code, taught, to an admiring crowd of students, the principles of Roman law which had been either neglected or unknown in the early Middle Ages. There, in 1140, the monk Gratian wrote the *Decretum* and became the chief authority for the study of canon law, which regulated and controlled the judicial system of the Church.

The students who attended this university and studied law were usually quite mature; some even had families. And thus they instituted a form of organization which left nearly all decisions and regulations in the hands of the student body. They acted as a corporation against the demands of the townspeople, for they could always employ a very effective weapon against them: migration to another town.

Professors were controlled in the same manner; not only their salaries but their lectures and ways of delivery were minutely regulated by the students, who themselves were organized into two sections: the *cismontane*, who were scholars from Italy, and the *transmontane*, who were scholars from beyond the Alps. The professors had only the power of granting degrees, while the students stoutly asserted their independence against both masters and townspeople by migration to Arezzo in 1215 and, seven years later, to Padua.

But Paris played a more decisive role throughout the Middle Ages. This city was the intellectual metropolis of the West. It was there that the first university was established in northern Europe, there that the recovery of Aristotle's works brought about a far-reaching reconstruction in thought, there that Scholasticism had its home and displayed its most effective influence. After Abelard had started, in Paris, to popularize dialectic by his colorful teaching methods and his audacious opposition to tradition-ridden authority, thousands of students had come to the city and there continued their studies after his death. The modern student of medieval philosophy becomes so habituated to finding Paris referred to as the capital of intellectual activity that he tends to forget the very existence of the lesser centers, such as Oxford for the Franciscans and Cologne for the Dominicans.

The university of Paris is believed to have originated in 1200, although there was a college in existence as early as 1170. Its direct predecessor was the Cathedral School of Notre Dame, where the orthodox William of Champeaux had lectured; but the school of St.

Geneviève, where Abelard became famous, and the school of St. Victor, which harbored the mystic teachers Hugo and Richard, also contributed to the growth of the university.

In Paris the masters of the four faculties—arts, medicine, canon law, and theology—possessed complete legislative, judicial, and executive powers. The masters of the arts, the largest department of the university, were divided into four nations—the French, the Picard, the Norman, and the English—following broad geographical divisions. Together the masters elected at short-time intervals a head of the university, whom they called rector. The candidates for degrees were licensed by the chancellor of the cathedral chapter of Notre Dame. This arrangement was begrudged by the members of the master guilds, who would have preferred themselves as the regulators of university teachers.

Usually the medieval student had to study four or five years to obtain his Bachelor of Arts, and three or four years more to become Master of Arts. To obtain a degree as Doctor of Theology, he was obliged to continue his studies over a longer period of time. At Paris he had to be at least thirty-five years old and to have completed fourteen years of residence work. Theology, medicine, and law were the proper subjects for graduate work. The course leading up to the Bachelor of Arts degree consisted mainly of studies in grammar, rhetoric, and logic; the subjects of the *quadrivium* were generally thrown into the background.

## AUTHORITIES

Aristotle became the chief textbook authority in the universities. Translations from his work had been made both in Spain and in the East to enrich the existing store of his writings, of which only a few were known at the time of Abelard. The introduction of the rest of his work stirred up a number of heresies, and consequently, in 1210, the provincial council unequivocally forbade the new Aristotle to be taught in Paris. Five years later the prohibition was renewed but applied only to his physical and metaphysical books.

In 1231 Pope Gregory IX again confirmed this condemnation but made a significant reservation in that he decreed the prohibition to last only until the books could be examined and purged of all heresy. After this task had been accomplished, a statute issued by the Faculty of Arts ordered nearly all Aristotelian writings to be used as textbooks.

Aristotle was not the only authority used in the universities. In grammar, Priscian and Donatus were consulted; in rhetoric, the commentaries of Boethius on classical authors were used. Theological instruction was based chiefly on the *Four books of sentences*, written by the scholarly Peter Lombard. For lawyers, the commentaries of Gratian and Irnerius were authoritative; while in medicine, which was best taught at Salerno, a host of Moslem medical works supplemented such classical authors as Hippocrates, Galen, Celsus, and Aristotle.

Paris served as the model for the universities of the Low Countries, Germany, Great Britain, and northern France; Bologna, on the other hand, became a pattern for the creation of universities in Italy, southern France, and Spain.

### THE IDEAL STUDENT

The discussion relating to the organization of the universities remains incomplete if we do not briefly outline the ideals of university life. The studies were intended to bring about an intimate comradeship between professor and student. For instance, Thomas Aquinas followed his master, Albertus Magnus, wherever he went. Within the university a new nobility grew up, founded upon brain power rather than upon physical prowess. However, the universities were not completely secularized in the Middle Ages, and thus the ideal student as pictured in the sermons of the priests could have been an ideal monk. At Paris the connection between the Church and the university was especially close, but this continued to be the case in nearly all the higher institutions of learning.

In their sermons the priests spoke of model students who studied from daybreak until nightfall, only taking time out to eat and to pray. They pictured scholars who were unaware of anything going on in the outside world, who were completely unresponsive to the lures of the opposite sex, who cared not for their health nor for their appearance, whose modesty and meekness added to their brilliant mental capacities.

The highest maxims of the Church encouraged an ascetic attitude on the part of university students and praised, most highly, reflective and introversive traits. The need for a sound system of recreation was totally ignored by the educational authorities.

Chaucer's description of the student in the *Canterbury tales* most vividly portrays the accepted medieval ideal. The student is a dili-

gent clerk of Oxford, lean and thin, in ragged clothes, who spends the little money he has on the books of Aristotle.

"A clerk of Oxford next my notice caught,  
That unto logic long had given his thought.  
His horse appeared as lean as is a rake,  
And he was nowise fat, I undertake;  
But looked all hollow, and of sober mien.  
Full threadbare was his upper mantle seen;  
For he, as yet, no benefice could gain,  
Nor would he worldly office entertain.  
For rather would he have, beside his bed,  
Some twenty books, all clad in black or red,  
Of Aristotle and his philosophy,  
Than fiddle, costly robes, or psaltery.  
But, though among philosophers enrolled,  
Within his chest he had but little gold;  
But all that he might gain from any friend  
On learning and on books would he expend,  
And duly for the souls of those he prayed  
That for his studies gave substantial aid.  
To gather learning took he care and heed,  
And ne'er a word would utter more than need;  
And all was said in form and reverence,  
In brief and lively terms, and full of sense,  
To moral virtue tended all his speech,  
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach."<sup>1</sup>

### WILLIAM OF AUVERGNE

William of Auvergne in many ways exhibited new academic ideals, although, generally, his philosophy was conservative. He was much less receptive to the Aristotelian influence than some of his successors, and he remained critical regarding Aristotle's principles. He studied theology at Paris and later taught there, becoming one of the outstanding scholars of his age.

It is noteworthy that William was especially influenced by Arabian philosophers. He did not agree with them, however, in believing that the universe is eternal and can be explained according to the process of emanation. Hence, he insisted that God had created the world out of nothing.

<sup>1</sup> Chaucer, *Prologue*, 285-308 (Skeat, *The prologue to the Canterbury tales*, pp. 14-15).

Like Augustine, William was imbued with the perfection and majesty of God. Compared with God, he taught, human beings are limited; they achieve their destiny only insofar as they participate in divine grace. He totally rejected the mechanistic hypothesis. According to him, the universe can only be conceived according to *divine purposes*. He was certain that God's providence extends to all the events of life.

William's doctrine of the soul shows traces of both Aristotelian and Augustinian concepts. He believed that man has only one soul; he did not make a distinction between the soul and its faculties. He made it clear that the soul is the ruling principle of the body. In the soul, according to William, we cannot find any material traces. The soul, he affirmed repeatedly, is simple, immaterial, and immortal.

In his theory of knowledge, William refused to accept the concept of the active intellect. Knowledge, he averred, starts with sense experience; our potential intellect derives an intelligible form from the senses without the intervention of the active intellect. In the highest stage of knowledge we experience a special illumination which transcends any type of rational experience. Through this illumination we understand the first principles of knowledge and are able to gain complete certainty.

### ALEXANDER OF HALES

The life of Alexander of Hales, like that of William of Auvergne, is veiled by obscurity. We do not know the exact date of his birth. We know, however, that he studied in Paris and, in 1222, became a Franciscan. For several years he was professor of theology at the university, and he died in 1245. His philosophy shows a systematic spirit. In the solution of philosophical problems he fairly described opposing viewpoints and occasionally drew upon Arabian and Jewish sources.

Like William of Auvergne, Alexander of Hales opposed the doctrine of emanation. He was certain that the universe had been created by a personal act of God. That God exists can be proven, he declared, both by viewing the order of the external world and by realizing the nature of our ideas. Being finite, we are not autonomous but need an infinite cause to explain our existence. He made it clear that the universe had been created according to God's perfect knowledge. Such creation implies the supremacy of divine purposes. All beings and creatures in the universe, thus, have a definite place and a definite function.

In his doctrine of the soul, Alexander of Hales believed in substantial forms, a view generally held by most of the Franciscan thinkers. By this doctrine he implied that the soul has its own matter and its own form; likewise, the body has its own corporeal form and matter. Still, body and soul are joined together. Needless to say, since both have their substantial forms, this union is rather tenuous. The main purpose of Alexander of Hales was to safeguard the integrity of the soul, and by giving it a separate form he thought he could establish its immortality without any doubt.

Another interesting doctrine which we find in Alexander of Hales' philosophy is his belief that matter has various manifestations. Thus he distinguished between spiritual and corporeal matter, the latter representing the lowest type.

This view, that we have various types of matter, was rejected by Thomas Aquinas, who was more faithful to the Aristotelian doctrine of matter.

### JOHN DE LA ROCHELLE

John de la Rochelle was one of the disciples of Alexander of Hales. He was born *c.* 1200 and when still quite young became a professor at Paris. His main work is the *Summa de anima*. Like Augustine, John de la Rochelle identified the soul with its faculties. In his system there is room for the active intellect, a theory which, however, does not imply that personal immortality is an illusion. He showed that we can reach certainty only through divine illumination, which represents an act of grace.

In the philosophy of John de la Rochelle, as in that of other Franciscans, a *mystical* element prevails. Reason, thus, is subordinate to a direct intuition of God. However, this mysticism does not lead to a pantheistic doctrine, for John emphasized the distance separating man from divine perfection.

### ROBERT GROSSETESTE

More significant than John de la Rochelle was Robert Grosseteste, who became chancellor at the university of Oxford. Grosseteste was interested not merely in theology but also in the physical sciences, and he was far superior to the other philosophers in his view that nature can be understood only through mathematical principles. Like most English philosophers, Grosseteste championed the scientific tradition, which frequently was neglected during the Middle Ages.

The philosophy of Grosseteste represents a strange synthesis of Augustinian, Neo-Platonic, Aristotelian, and Franciscan elements. In his philosophy he emphasized free will; if the human will is not free, he felt, we cannot explain man's moral actions. This concept of free will, however, does not imply that man can be saved without the intercession of the Church, which acts as an intermediary between human beings and God.

In his doctrine of God, he exemplified the mystical spirit by speaking of God as light. In fact, the principle of light plays a large role in his system. Perfection is determined by the way and the extent in which we share in the divine luminosity. He believed that the light of the soul is superior in clarity to the light of the body. Furthermore, light explains the perfection of the universe and is the symbol of man's knowledge. All truth, according to Grosseteste, represents a state of illumination.

"Created truth too, therefore, shows that which is, but not in its own illumination (lumen), but in the light (lux) of the supreme truth, as color shows body, but only in the light spread upon it. Nor is this an insufficiency of light, that it reveals body through color, since color itself is not a shining light added to a superfused light; but the power of light is this, that light does not obscure color which lights up beyond itself, but, on the other hand, it does not illumine that which lights up beyond itself. In the same fashion is the power of the light of the supreme truth, which so illumines the created truth that, illumined itself, it reveals the true object. Consequently, the light of the supreme truth is not to other truths as the sun is to other luminaries of the sky, which it obscures in its brightness, but rather as the sun to colors which it illumines. The light alone, therefore, of the supreme truth shows first and through itself that which is, as light alone shows bodies. But by this light the truth of the thing, too, shows that which is, as color shows bodies by the light of the sun."<sup>2</sup>

Now the knowledge of supreme truth depends upon the purity of heart of the believer. All share in the vision of supreme perfection, Grosseteste continued, but the virtuous see it in the light of truth itself.

"In this manner, I think that many impure men, too, see the supreme truth and many of them do not perceive in any wise that they see it, as, if anyone should see colored bodies for the first time

<sup>2</sup> *On truth* (McKeon, *Selections from medieval philosophers*, vol. 1, pp. 273-274).



in the light of the sun and should never turn his gaze to the sun, nor should have learned from any one that there is a sun or any other light that illumined bodies which are seen, he would ignore wholly that he sees bodies in the light of the sun and he would ignore that he sees anything besides only colored body. The pure in heart, however, and those perfectly purified, look upon the light of truth in itself, which the impure are not able to do. There is no one, therefore, who knows any truth, who does not also know in some manner, knowingly or ignorantly, the supreme truth itself. It is evident now, therefore, how the pure in heart alone see the supreme truth and how not even the impure are kept wholly from the vision of it."<sup>3</sup>

### BONAVENTURA

One of the outstanding Franciscan philosophers was Bonaventura. He was born *c.* 1221 in Tuscany, joined the Franciscans, and then studied at Paris. He became a teacher of theology in 1253 and in 1257 was made head of his order. Three years later he drew up a new constitution for the Franciscans. He consistently rose in fame and thus was raised to the office of cardinal. He died in 1274 while attending the council of Lyons.

What is most significant in the philosophy of Bonaventura is his mysticism. He shows that man is equipped with a threefold vision: first, with the eye of the flesh; second, with the eye of reason; and third, with the eye of contemplation, which represents the highest stage of his knowledge.

To find God, he explained, we must use a spiritual ladder which leads us from external nature to the soul, in which we find a reflection of God's grace. Utilizing the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, we are able to comprehend God in his perfection and goodness.

The doctrine of the Trinity, Bonaventura asserted, has not only a metaphysical but also a mystical function. In the highest stage we experience an ineffable vision, which cannot be described by the categories of philosophy. He declared that human reason should be subordinated to divine revelation:

"For the Source lies not in human investigation, but in divine revelation, which flows from the Father of lights, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and earth is named, from whom, through his Son Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit flows in us; and through the Holy Spirit bestowing, as he wills, gifts on each, faith is given, and

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 274-275.

through faith Christ dwells in our hearts. This is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, from which, as from a source, comes the certitude and understanding of the whole Scripture. Wherefore it is impossible that any one should advance in its knowledge, unless he first has Christ infused in him. . . .

"The *Progress* of Holy Scripture is not bound to the laws of reasonings and definitions, like the other sciences; but, conformably to supernatural light, proceeds to give to man the wayfarer a knowledge of things sufficing for his salvation, by plain words in part mystically: it presents the contents of the universe as in a *Summa*, in which is observed the *breadth*; it describes the descent (from above) in which is considered the *length*; it describes the goodness of the saved, in which is considered the *height*; it describes the misery of the damned, in which consists the *depth* not only of the universe itself but of the divine judgment. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

Philosophy can deal only with the facts of nature, Bonaventura resumed, whereas theology represents the Holy Spirit and symbolizes the working of grace:

"Philosophy treats of things as they are in nature or in the anima according to the knowledge which is naturally implanted or acquired. But theology as a science founded upon faith and revealed by the Holy Spirit, treats of those matters which belong to grace and glory and to the eternal wisdom. Whence placing philosophic cognition beneath itself, and drawing from nature as much as it may need to make a mirror yielding a reflection of things divine, it constructs a ladder which presses the earth at the base and touches heaven at the top: and all this through that one hierarch Jesus Christ, who through his assumption of human nature, is hierarch not in the ecclesiastical hierarchy alone, but also in the angelic; and is the medial person in the divine hierarchy of the most blessed Trinity."<sup>5</sup>

In his metaphysical doctrines Bonaventura started with the existence of God as the fundamental principle of philosophy. He accepted the ontological proof, for he held that essence and existence are identical. Relative certainty, he maintained, implies an absolute certainty. We find God in the experience of our soul. In fact, according to Bonaventura, the majesty of God is revealed throughout nature, which obeys his laws and which is dominated by his divine providence.

<sup>4</sup> *Breviloquium*, Prologus.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Like most of the other Scholastics, Bonaventura asserted the doctrine of emanation to be invalid and believed the universe to have been created in time by God. Whereas in God, he said, essence and existence are identical, created beings have a form and a matter. This condition also applies to angels, who do not have pure forms but a material substratum.

Bonaventura reasoned that matter is active, that it contains germs which are responsible for the production of variety in nature. These he called seminal reasons. Likewise, he talked about the plurality of substantial forms. By this term he meant that both the body and the soul have each its own form. The form of the body, however, is a potentiality of which the *soul is the actuality*. This doctrine was rejected by Aquinas, who believed in a more intimate union between body and soul.

In general, the philosophy of Bonaventura is characterized by emphasis on the will. Intellectualism, thus, is not adequate in the search for God, for to love God is more important than to know him. In the highest stage of knowledge, Bonaventura declared, philosophical categories are inadequate and, instead, we have a state of emotional ecstasy.

### MATTHEW OF AQUASPARTA

Matthew of Aquasparta was one of Bonaventura's pupils. He was born between 1234 and 1240 and died in 1302. He taught at Paris and at Bologna and later became a professor in Rome. In 1288 he was made cardinal.

The Augustinian influence was especially evident in Matthew, who throughout his life fought against Skepticism and opposed anyone who doubted the truth of Christian dogma. In his philosophy we have a strain of occasionalism. He explained that God not only is the author of our intelligence but responsible for all our intellectual reactions. In short, we think through God; intellectual certainty depends upon the co-operation of divine forces.

"For God is the *whole* cause of things and cause of the *whole* of things: therefore, things depend on his providence. But things are not the *necessary* cause of our knowledge; for God could imprint on our understanding species of things through which we should know, as he imparts them to angels. Moreover, things are not the whole and only cause, but together with the light of our active intellect and the divine light; and therefore, if they are in some manner the *original* cause, still they are not the *conservative* cause,

nor with respect to its conservation does our knowledge depend on things."<sup>6</sup>

Human truths, according to Matthew of Aquasparta, depend upon the divine light, which we find within ourselves and of which we have an immediate awareness.

### ALBERTUS MAGNUS

In turning to Albertus Magnus we are entering a different tradition, which culminates in the work of Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of the medieval Scholastics. Albertus Magnus was a Dominican, the descendant of a noble German family. He taught in various cities, among them Freiburg, Strasbourg, and Cologne, and later in Paris, where he was recognized as an inspiring teacher. In 1248 he returned to Cologne to undertake the reorganization of the university. He rapidly advanced in ecclesiastical honors and became bishop of Ratisbon in 1260.

During the last years of his life, Albertus Magnus lived in virtual retirement, interrupted only when he heard that the teachings of his famous student were condemned in Paris. With vigor he defended Thomas Aquinas, for whom he had immense respect. His death in 1280 was a great loss to the Dominican order.

The starting point of Albertus Magnus' philosophy was natural science, and he investigated nature more thoroughly than any other thinker in his day. He was especially interested in botany and zoology. Independent in his researches, he frequently departed from Aristotelian concepts. Unlike Augustine, he did not believe that the study of physical nature is a waste of time; rather, he felt that it adds to our understanding of the majesty of God.

In his scientific method Albertus Magnus did not merely rely on deduction but used the inductive method as well. He repeatedly warned his students not to accept theories merely on the basis of authority but to make experiments for themselves and to form their own hypotheses.

His philosophy reflects a variety of influences; Aristotle, the Jewish thinkers, Neo-Platonists, Arabian commentators, all left their impress. His interpretation of Aristotle was more objective than that of his predecessors. The faith, he was sure, could not be disturbed by the introduction of Aristotelian concepts. Nor were his

<sup>6</sup> *Ten disputed questions on knowledge* (McKeon, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 263-264).

Christian ideals shaken by Arabic and Jewish influences. He strongly believed in revelation, in the immortality of the soul, and in the need for the mediation of Jesus Christ. His doctrines were opposed to all forms of pantheism, for his concept of the universe was *pluralistic* and made a sharp distinction between God and nature.

The Augustinian impact was evident in his philosophy, especially in his belief in seminal reasons, which he used to explain the activity of nature. He believed that the universe is not eternal although man cannot demonstrate this fact by the use of reason.

Unlike Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus held that angels have both form and matter. Like the other Scholastic philosophers, he thought the Arabic thinkers mistaken in their belief in a world-soul and a universal intellect.

In his proof of the existence of God, Albertus Magnus turned against the old tradition in his refusal to accept the ontological argument. He depended on the cosmological argument for the existence of God, which implies that we cannot have an infinite regress and that we need a first cause to explain the multitude of effects in the phenomenal world. Regarding his doctrine of the soul, Albertus Magnus declared the soul to be immaterial, and its intellectuality not derived from matter.

"It is, moreover, easy for us to come to a decision concerning the nature of the intellectual soul, since it has its nature from the fact that it is a procession from the first cause, but not emanating to the point of intermixture with matter; and therefore it is even called by some wise men of our dispensation the *image* of God. For it has from its assimilation to the first cause, a universally active intellect, which is like a separated light, as has been shown properly in the third book *on the Soul*. Nevertheless, from the fact that this nature is appropriated to the organic physical body, its intellectual nature is immersed a little, and therefore it has a possible intellect which derives its material from imagination and sense: and since this nature is separated and not immersed in matter with respect to itself, it is necessary that it be universal; and therefore the soul is universally cognitive of all things intellectually, and not only of certain things, for certain things are not made determinate except by matter; but we said that the intellect is separate."<sup>7</sup>

Albertus Magnus opposed, thus, the principles of Avicbron, who believed that the intellectuality of the soul is derived from matter.

<sup>7</sup> *The short natural treatises on the intellect and the intelligible (ibid., vol. 1, p. 344).*

"This statement, of course, is erroneous and opposed by all peripatetics, for the intellect is by no means all things in potentiality as first matter is all things in potentiality, because the forms which are individual with respect to material being are not separate from those which are in potentiality in matter. The forms, however, which are in potentiality in the intellect, are universals, separate from individuating elements, and especially from matter, existing not here and now, but everywhere and always.

"For all this, however, matter does not make forms to be in themselves by means of something which is of the same nature and genus as matter. But the intellect has something of its own, namely, the active intellect, which makes forms to be in the intellectual soul."<sup>8</sup>

In Albertus Magnus we find a transitional standpoint. To some extent he was still part of the past and accepted the Augustinian framework of knowledge; but he anticipated the future by his scientific interests and his reliance upon Aristotle. Thus he paved the way for the work of Thomas Aquinas.

#### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe the university of Bologna.
2. How did the university of Paris differ from Bologna?
3. Compare the medieval professor with the modern professor.
4. Describe the clerk of Oxford as pictured by Chaucer.
5. How did the rediscovery of Aristotle invigorate philosophy?
6. Describe the philosophical views of Alexander of Hales.
7. Explain the main beliefs of William of Auvergne.
8. Why was Grosseteste more advanced than his contemporaries?
9. What is the highest form of knowledge, according to Grosseteste?
10. In what way did Albertus Magnus exhibit an interest in science?
11. Describe the faith of Bonaventura.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

## THOMAS AQUINAS

. . . . .

### THE SPIRIT OF AQUINAS

Aquinas reflected all the currents of medieval life. Through him Aristotle became one of the guiding influences of Catholicism. In his system Aquinas presented a definite outline of the relationship between philosophy and theology and demonstrated how man's faith can be bolstered through reason. While he was especially influenced by Aristotle, there nevertheless are Augustinian strains in his philosophy. Like Augustine, he made a sharp division between man and God and was certain that the human soul is immortal.

Through his teacher, Albertus Magnus, Aquinas absorbed a tireless interest in nature, and his philosophy is consequently more empirical than that of his predecessors. We notice his powers of observation and frequent appeals to natural and physical science in support of his arguments. We do not imply, however, that Aquinas accepted a modern perspective. A naturalistic explanation of life he regarded as utterly inadequate; to him, metaphysical descriptions were superior to scientific hypotheses.

To appreciate the world-view of Aquinas we must remember that he generally followed the Aristotelian physical theories. Thus he

regarded the movement of the heavens as superior to the movement of the earth and asserted that while heaven is dominated by a spherical motion, the earth is governed by a rectilinear motion. He believed the geocentric hypothesis to be the most trustworthy, although he was not categorical on this point.

Aquinas' scientific views were dominated by his belief in divine intervention. God, thus, is the beginning and end of all wisdom. We cannot explain lower creatures of the universe according to the laws of causality. We can only describe them according to the laws which govern the highest realms of being. In short, Aquinas' universe contains five distinct classes: first, the inorganic realm; second, the realm of animals; third, the realm of man; fourth, the realm of the angels; fifth, the realm of God. All of nature, according to Aquinas, is guided by God, who represents both the source and the end of existence. Without God's intervention man remains in a state of sin and complete ignorance, and his life represents a pilgrimage of futility.

It was the desire of Aquinas to fight against any type of heresy. While he used the Arabian commentators, he did not agree with their doctrines. He could not tolerate their impersonal view of life and denial of personal immortality, for he was an insistent believer in Christian truth, without which he thought man can not gain certainty.

### THE LIFE OF AQUINAS

Aquinas was born *c.* 1225, the son of a noble family in Italy. In his early youth he was sent to Monte Cassino, where his uncle was one of the leaders of the order. He was imbued with the liberal arts, and, probably at Cassino, he acquired a taste for philosophy. Later he studied at the university of Naples, where he was exposed to all kinds of worldly temptations; but, according to his biographers, he remained free from all these influences and instead devoted himself to intellectual studies.

Against the opposition of his family, Aquinas joined the Dominican order in 1243. His family went so far as to imprison him, for they regarded an ecclesiastical career as unworthy of his talents. He escaped from imprisonment and went to Paris, where he attended the university, and later to Cologne, where he was exposed to the teachings of Albertus Magnus.

As a student Aquinas was rather reticent and did not very often express himself. His fellow students thought him slow intellectually,



but they certainly were mistaken, for Aquinas probably was one of the most brilliant scholars of all time. After remaining in Cologne for four years, he returned to Paris, where he became one of the Dominican professors. Later he taught in Rome and then returned to Paris in 1269. At this time he was fighting especially against the Averrhoist heresy. In 1272 he departed again for Italy, where he taught at Naples for a year. His death took place in 1274. Among Aquinas' most influential books we find the *Summa theologica* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*.

### THEOLOGY

Aquinas based his philosophy on the certainty of God's existence. He realized that many theologians believed universal consent to be sufficient in establishing the existence of God, but he refused to accept this argument. There were other theologians who asserted that the existence of God is an object of faith which cannot be demonstrated by philosophy. Aquinas, however, maintained the existence of God *can* be known by natural reason. He used five arguments in his attempt to prove his point.

The first argument was derived from the nature of motion: "It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now, whatever is moved is moved by another, for nothing can be moved except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is moved; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, *i.e.*, that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is moved must be moved by another. If that by which it is moved be itself moved, then this also must needs be moved by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on into infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover, seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover; as the staff moves only

because it is moved by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, moved by no other; and this everyone understands to be God."<sup>1</sup>

The second argument was based on causation: "In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God."<sup>2</sup>

The third argument was founded on the concept of possibility and necessity: "We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from

<sup>1</sup> *Summa theologiae*, 1, Question 2, Art. 3. From *Basic writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* by Anton C. Pegis. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc. Copyright 1945 by Random House, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God."<sup>3</sup>

The fourth argument was based on the concept of gradation: "Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But *more* and *less* are predicated of different things according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest, and, consequently, something which is most being, for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph.* ii. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus, as fire, which is the maximum of heat is the cause of all hot things, as is said in the same book. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God."<sup>4</sup>

The fifth argument rested upon the divine government of the world: "We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence, it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God."<sup>5</sup>

Notice that in his arguments for the existence of God Aquinas did not accept the ontological proof, which he regarded as inadequate. The proofs he gave indicate his systematic way of philosophizing.

After having established the existence of God, Aquinas proceeded to show what the attributes of God are. We know, for example, that God is not subject to composition and that he is unchanging. Hence, there is no potentiality in God; rather, Aquinas made clear, God is pure actuality or pure form.

Furthermore, God is the same as his essence: "To understand this, it must be noted that in things composed of matter and form, the nature or essence must differ from the *suppositum*, for the essence

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

or nature includes only what falls within the definition of the species; as humanity includes all that falls within the definition of man, for it is by this that man is man, and it is this that humanity signifies, that, namely, whereby man is man. Now individual matter, with all the individuating accidents, does not fall within the definition of the species. For this particular flesh, these bones, this blackness or whiteness, etc., do not fall within the definition of a man. Therefore this flesh, these bones and the accidental qualities designating this particular matter, are not included in humanity; and yet they are included in the reality which is a man. Hence, the reality which is a man has something in it that humanity does not have. Consequently, humanity and a man are not wholly identical, but humanity is taken to mean the formal part of a man, because the principles whereby a thing is defined function as the formal constituent in relation to individuating matter. The situation is different in things not composed of matter and form, in which individuation is not due to individual matter—that is to say, to *this* matter—but the forms themselves are individuated of themselves. Here it is necessary that the forms themselves should be subsisting *supposita*. Therefore *suppositum* and nature in them are identified. Since, then, God is not composed of matter and form, he must be his own Godhead, his own Life, and whatever else is so predicated of him.”<sup>6</sup>

Aquinas asserted that there is no matter in God, who is a pure spirit. In a word, God is the source of all perfection. This assertion raises the problem of providence and evil. Is evil metaphysically real? Like the Neo-Platonists, Aquinas answered that evil represents merely a privation of form:

“In action, evil is caused by reason of the defect of some principle of action, either of the principal or the instrumental agent. Thus, the defect in the movement of an animal may happen by reason of the weakness of the motive power, as in the case of children, or by reason only of the ineptitude of the instrument, as in the lame. On the other hand, evil is caused in a thing, but not in the proper effect of the agent, sometimes by the power of the agent, sometimes by reason of a defect, either of the agent or of the matter. It is caused by reason of the power or perfection of the agent when there necessarily follows on the form intended by the agent the privation of another form; as for instance, when on the form of fire there follows the privation of the form of air or of water. Therefore, as the more perfect the fire is in strength, so much the more

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Question 3, Art. 3.

perfectly does it impress its own form; so also the more perfectly does it corrupt the contrary. Hence that evil and corruption befall air and water comes from the perfection of the fire, but accidentally; because fire does not aim at the privation of the form of water, but at the introduction of its own form, though by doing this it also accidentally causes the other. But if there is a defect in the proper effect of the fire—as, for instance, that it fails to heat—this comes either by defect of the action, which implies the defect of some principle, as was said above, or by the indisposition of the matter, which does not receive the action of the fire acting on it. But the fact itself that it is a deficient being is accidental to good to which it belongs essentially to act. Hence it is true that evil in no way has any but an accidental cause.”<sup>7</sup>

All this does not invalidate God’s providence. In this way Aquinas turned against the ancient philosophers, especially Democritus, whom, however, he did not interpret correctly, for he ascribed the doctrine of chance to the Greek Atomist.

“We must say, however, that all things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual being. This is made evident thus. For since every agent acts for an end, the ordering of effects towards that end extends as far as the causality of the first agent extends. Whence it happens that in the effects of an agent something takes place which has no reference toward the end, because the effect comes from some other cause outside the intention of the agent. But the causality of God, who is the first agent, extends to all beings not only as to the constituent principles of species, but also as to the individualizing principles; not only of things incorruptible, but also of things corruptible. Hence all things that exist in whatsoever manner are necessarily directed by God towards the end. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Augustine, Aquinas did not emphasize the divine will; rather, he asserted that God does not act in an arbitrary manner but that God’s actions are determined by his goodness. As the cause of all Being, Aquinas continued, God created the world, which was made *out of nothing*. In other words, all species were produced at once, a conclusion which Darwin attacked in his theory of evolution. It is a mistake to assume, according to Aquinas, that God was affected by the act of creation, for he remained the same in his perfection and majesty. It may now be asked why God created the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Question 49, Art. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Question 22, Art. 2.

world. What was his goal? Aquinas answered that it was an expression of his goodness. Through this act God established a definite purpose, namely, the vision of his own perfection.

The skeptic may inquire why there are so many gradations in the universe and why there are so many forms of life. Again Aquinas has a ready answer. He believed that in this manner creation was more diversified and exemplified the various aspects of the divine nature. Creation itself shows the generosity of God, who certainly was not obliged to make every man equal.

Regarding the eternity of the world, Aquinas refused to accept the Aristotelian viewpoint. Yet, he asserted, reason can neither prove nor disprove whether the universe is eternal. Here he relied on faith, which maintains that matter was created by God.

### COSMOLOGY

Most significant in the cosmology of Aquinas was his view of matter and form. According to him, *matter cannot exist apart from form*. Some of the Scholastics had asserted that matter can be autonomous, but Aquinas felt this really to be a contradiction, for matter, he said, is undetermined and consequently cannot exist by itself.

The distinction between men and angels, he wrote, lies in the fact that angels do not have bodies but are pure forms. Men, on the other hand, contain both matter and form. He rejected the Franciscan doctrine that man can have several forms. Thus he threw out the old tradition of Scholasticism which upheld the existence of a plurality of substantial forms.

In describing the principle of individuation Aquinas made it clear that *matter* is the principle which distinguishes one individual from another. The imperfection of the universe can be attributed to the resistance of matter to form. We must not interpret Aquinas, however, to state that matter is the metaphysical principle of evil. Like Aristotle, *Aquinas identified matter with potentiality and form with actuality*. The form, then, is the determining principle, since it represents actuality. Whereas human beings can never be completely emancipated from potentiality, he maintained, God represents pure actuality.

Aquinas followed Aristotle, too, in his view of space and time. Space, he held, cannot be abstracted from the existence of bodies. He did not accept the doctrine that space is infinite, for this would have been contrary to Christian theology. He showed time to be dependent on motion; and he made it clear that time, like space, is

finite. Still, he was certain, the human concept of time differs from that of God, in whom past, present, and future are comprehended simultaneously.

### DOCTRINE OF THE SOUL

In his concept of the soul Aquinas brought about a simplification in medieval philosophy. Unlike the Neo-Platonists, he did not believe there are forms which intervene between the soul and the body. Both are joined in a definite union, he asserted; the body represents matter or the potential principles of life, whereas the soul represents the form or the actual principles of life. The union of the soul and the body is not merely accidental. It is needed for complete activity in man. By the term soul Aquinas referred not merely to man's intellectual capacities but to all his vital activities. Because of his possession of a soul, Aquinas declared, man is a rational creature. The soul, consequently, is the director of the body and superior to it. However, it depends on the body for its operations, and the body influences its outlook and activities.

Aquinas made a sharp distinction between three types of soul: first, the vegetative soul, which governs plant life; second, the sensitive soul, which governs animal life; and third, the rational soul, which dominates human life. The rational soul is the highest manifestation of life, since it represents the supremacy of *intellect over matter*.

Aquinas was not very much concerned about animal life. He taught that animals exist for the sake of man, who is the highest member of creation. He did not favor cruelty to animals, not so much out of respect for animal life but, rather, because he desired to prevent any type of callousness on the part of human beings. Aquinas lacked the lyrical feeling of Francis, who regarded all parts of creation as symbols of God's providence.

Aquinas explained that while the soul of man is one and while it possesses unity, it is distinguished by several faculties. Thus, he enumerated the faculties of locomotion, nutrition, sensation, reason, and appetite, which includes man's will. That the soul is immaterial he accepted without question. He bolstered his argument by pointing to the fact that we are able to know immaterial things, and that man's ideas possess not merely a relative but a universal necessity. With vigor he attacked the philosophers who asserted that the soul is corporeal and that it is completely dependent upon bodily operations.

The soul, Aquinas taught, depends only *extrinsically* upon the body. Consequently he believed in personal immortality.

"We must assert that the intellectual principle which we call the human soul is incorruptible. For a thing may be corrupted in two ways—in itself and accidentally. Now it is impossible for any subsistent being to be generated or corrupted accidentally, that is, by the generation or corruption of something else. For generation and corruption belong to a thing in the same way that being belongs to it, which is acquired by generation and lost by corruption. Therefore, whatever has being in itself cannot be generated or corrupted except in itself; while things which do not subsist, such as accidents and material forms, acquire being or lose it through the generation or corruption of composites. Now it was shown above that the souls of brutes are not self-subsistent, whereas the human soul is, so that the souls of brutes are corrupted, when their bodies are corrupted, while the human soul could not be corrupted unless it were corrupted in itself. This is impossible, not only as regards the human soul, but also as regards anything subsistent that is a form alone. For it is clear that what belongs to a thing by virtue of the thing itself is inseparable from it. But being belongs to a form, which is an act, by virtue of itself. And thus, matter acquires actual being according as it acquires form; while it is corrupted so far as the form is separated from it. But it is impossible for a form to be separated from itself; and therefore it is impossible for a subsistent form to cease to exist."<sup>9</sup>

Even if we grant that the soul is composed of matter and form, Aquinas continued, its incorruptibility must still be maintained.

"For corruption is found only where there is contrariety, since generation and corruption are from contraries and into contraries. Therefore the heavenly bodies, since they have no matter subject to contrariety, are incorruptible. Now there can be no contrariety in the intellectual soul; for it is a receiving subject according to the manner of its being, and those things which it receives are without contrariety. Thus, the notions even of contraries are not themselves contrary, since contraries belong to the same science. Therefore it is impossible for the intellectual soul to be corruptible."<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, our desire for immortality cannot be in vain. Aquinas almost anticipated Unamuno's argument in *The tragic sense of life*:

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Question 75, Art. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



"Moreover we may take a sign of this from the fact that everything naturally aspires to being after its own manner. Now, in things that have knowledge, desire ensues upon knowledge. The senses indeed do not know being, except under the conditions of *here* and *now*, whereas the intellect apprehends being absolutely, and for all time; so that everything that has an intellect naturally desires always to exist. But a natural desire cannot be in vain. Therefore every intellectual substance is incorruptible."<sup>11</sup>

Following Christian theology, Aquinas stressed the reality of resurrection. Thus, the soul which survives after death will ultimately be reunited with the body. Incidentally, he did not accept the Neo-Platonic view of the emanation of the soul, for he believed that it is *created* by God.

### THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

In all his theories Aquinas was guided by the view that the realms of reason and faith are not opposed to each other. In fact, a complete harmony exists between the two, he declared, and reason can be helpful in establishing the foundations of Christian philosophy. Still, he thought the human mind is limited; thus a rational demonstration is inadequate in proving the resurrection, the incarnation, and the atonement. Reason, he was sure, cannot disprove the essential facts of the Christian faith, for he contended that Christian dogmas are completely consistent and that they represent God's revelation.

In a sense we have a two-way passage in Aquinas. On the one hand we have reason, which starts with man and ultimately reaches God. On the other hand we have faith, which starts with the revelation of God and is supported by man's rational capacities.

The sciences were classified by Aquinas into three parts: (1) *physical*; (2) *mathematical*; (3) *metaphysical*. Of these three, he was mostly concerned with metaphysics, which represents the highest degree of abstraction.

In Aquinas' works philosophy is distinguished from theology because of its use of reason. Philosophy depends upon systematic demonstrations, while theology uses the method of faith. Still, there is no absolute division of the two fields, for all knowledge is a unified whole. Theology Aquinas likewise divided into two fields: natural theology, which relies on reason; and revealed theology, which uses the method of faith.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

In his doctrine of knowledge, Aquinas was a moderate realist. He did not agree with Plato that universals have an objective existence in nature. In this connection he refused to accept ontological essences. He taught that universals exist in three ways: first, as causes in the mind of God (*ante rem*); second, as ideas in the human mind (*post rem*); third, as the essence of things (*in re*). Notice how Aquinas tried to mediate between extreme nominalism and extreme realism. He did this by showing that universals have various meanings when applied to God, man, and nature.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas felt that science is concerned with universal essences. Thus, knowledge is conceptual. Concepts, however, are not a *primum*; for we are not born with immaterial ideas. According to him, the intellect contains *nothing that we do not find in the senses*. The process of knowledge starts with our senses, which give us a perception of the objects of nature. The problem for Aquinas was how this perception could be translated into intelligible ideas. To solve this, he used the active intellect, which abstracts the universal elements from the particular objects and thus creates the *intelligible species* for the potential intellect.

It is important to notice that Aquinas had a high regard for the active intellect, whereas most Franciscan theologians scarcely appreciated it. The active intellect, he declared, gives us an understanding of the metaphysical structure of the universe. Through it we become acquainted with the first principles, which govern all realms of being. He interpreted the active intellect in personalistic terms and refused to accept the impersonal view of the Arabian commentators, who maintained that the active intellect is completely independent of individual existence.

It is significant that Aquinas *rejected any form of skepticism*. Experience, to him, was not a chaotic process; rather, it indicated the existence of universal principles. Particular qualities, then, are not isolated; they have *essential* qualities in common. It is the task of science to classify and describe these qualities. Science consequently, according to Aquinas, is concerned with universals. Indeed, the more universal the science, the more important it is for human welfare.

The modern philosophy of science is quite different from the view which Aquinas championed. Modern science believes knowledge is best attained through a consideration of *particular* qualities. Nor does modern science have a high regard for immaterial Being, which it dismisses as part of an obsolete metaphysical heritage.

## ETHICS

The ethical system of Aquinas was based on his consideration of the highest Good. He believed this impossible of achievement in our present existence. We must wait for the Beyond, he taught, in which we can arrive at a complete vision of God.

Unlike the classical moralists, he emphasized the superiority of *theological* virtues. He had much to say on the subject of faith. While he was tolerant regarding unbelievers and advocated association with them provided one's faith was not corrupted, he was sharp in his denunciation of heretics. He thought that heretics should be excommunicated and, if they persisted in their errors and if all hope for their conversion was in vain, put to death as a fitting punishment. Death should not be inflicted directly by the Church but through secular judges, who would see to it that the heretics received their just punishment.

Aquinas maintained that the foundation of virtue is charity, which, to him, meant more than philanthropy, for it stood for the spirit of love. The love for God comes first, he affirmed, and all other things are to be subordinated to it. His concept of love, however, was not absolute since it did not include heretics.

Because asceticism played a strong role in the moral system of Aquinas, he agreed with Augustine that celibacy is to be preferred to marriage. Married life, thus, in his opinion is inferior to a monastic existence.

Aquinas had a profound effect on later ages through his assertion that matrimony cannot be dissolved, for, he believed, the dissolution of marriage not only destroys civil society but is an act against God. He asserted that monogamy is a natural condition for man. Incidentally, he advanced strong arguments against birth control. In the family, the father is to be supreme, he declared. As can be seen, Aquinas' views are representative of the patriarchal spirit of the Middle Ages.

Regarding freedom of the will, he asserted that man is in a different position from God, for God, being the source of all goodness, cannot choose evil. Man, on the other hand, is constantly perplexed by various alternatives. We are caught by material desires and frequently are in doubt as to the end of life. We choose things which are inferior and lead us away from God. We can gain complete freedom, he advised, by choosing those things which promote our eternal happiness and approximate the divine nature.

*Aquinas was emphatic in his view that the human will is not determined by external things.* It is up to us, he averred, to choose among various alternatives. When we elect superficial and vain goals, we become eligible for the punishment which is connected with such action.

In his moral theory Aquinas exhibited an *intellectual* inclination, for he believed that the end of man is to know God. This knowledge can be acquired through reason, revelation, or intuition. He almost omitted a discussion of intuition; consequently, he did not believe in the illumination of the soul. He felt the intellect to be more significant than the will. *Through the intellect we attain certainty, whereas the will remains subject to change.*

### POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Aquinas, whose political philosophy is representative of 13th-century thought, stressed morality as an ideal of statehood. His theories, which may seem utopian to the modern reader, were influenced by the accomplishments of Innocent III, probably the greatest of the medieval Popes.

To Aquinas, the origin of the state was inseparably linked with the social nature of man, and from Aristotle he borrowed the description of man as a *political animal*. Since man is not equipped by nature for self-preservation, in the same manner as are animals, he can only attain the goals of his existence in conjunction with others.

Social authority, Aquinas contended, is therefore grounded in the very nature of man and is derived from God. There would have been a state and society even if man had not been expelled from Paradise.

The state, in Aquinas' teaching, is based upon the organization of the family, which owes its origin to a God-implemented instinct. The family is the primary social organism and existed before the community. Essentially, the family is a permanent, unchangeable institution, since it both rests upon the supernatural will and satisfies "natural" needs.

Behind Aquinas' political theories there is therefore a certain kind of historical perspective, although historical knowledge was limited in the Middle Ages. For instance, one supposition which the writers of the Middle Ages accepted as a factual basis for their theories, and Aquinas was no exception, pertained to the life of man in Paradise, when he was free from the guilt of original sin.

To the writers of Aquinas' time, history began with the highest, noblest, and most satisfying existence, while history as we know it started with the "brutish" life of savages.<sup>12</sup> At the outset of any genetic study, the medieval student found himself confronted with the inspiring ideal of Paradise, offering him hope for future salvation. The modern student, however, finds himself disillusioned when he starts to study history; he begins to realize that although man has come a long way from the illiterate primitive with his totem and taboo, we are still bound to preliterate culture forms in many instances.

After the expulsion from Paradise, according to medieval writers, man encountered anarchy, division, and disunity. But through group organization he guaranteed a better life and established security. The nations, then, which existed before the Christian revelation were merely training grounds and experiments in human organization. Only in the Christian state, guided by the teachings of the Church and faithful to her leaders and doctrines, did man reach an approximation to the happiness of Paradise.

Besides this historical background, which we must take into account in any consideration of Aquinas' political philosophy, there must be a correlation of his political and other philosophic theories. Society, according to Thomistic ethics, cannot be all-powerful and coercive. The state cannot be an impersonal organism dominating everything, for its *raison d'être* lies primarily in the service which it performs for the welfare of the human being.

Again, a theoretical question emerges, Is the state a real Being? No, Aquinas would have emphatically answered. And he would have been supported by the legal theorists. They defined the state as a collection of individuals, in short, as a fictitious entity. The pluralistic philosophy of Scholasticism denied that the universal is a veritable thing and maintained that the "only real beings are individual beings." Accordingly, Aquinas asserted, the city or the state has no real entity outside the individuals composing it. The individual possesses unity, while the universal possesses reality only in so far as it is composed of individual substances.

## PHILOSOPHY OF LAW

According to Aquinas, there are four kinds of laws: (1) the eternal, (2) the natural, (3) the divine, and (4) the human law. There must be an undeviating canon or maxim for the whole of creation—the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Gilson, *The spirit of medieval philosophy*, pp. 389–390.

Eternal Law, a blueprint according to which the world is created and governed. In its essence this law cannot be comprehended by rational man. Its imprint can be reflected in the natural law, which causes all created beings to seek a life compatible with their endowments; to seek good and to avoid evil; and to preserve their lives. The natural law supplies the human being with inalienable rights which are his by the very nature of things, such as the right to beget children and to live in society.

While natural law is common to all people, Aquinas thought, divine law is the prerogative and priceless heritage of the Christian. He declared it could be identified with the revelation of religion, with those celestial mysteries and miracles which the Christian receives through the grace of God and which natural law would never have found. Thus, the Ten Commandments are products of the divine law.

Finally, Aquinas concluded his classification of laws with human law, which he divided into *jus gentium* and *jus civile*. Human law, he explained, represents natural law applied to specific cases. For example, according to natural law it is wrong to commit murder, but it is up to human law to provide appropriate punishments, varying according to customs and circumstances. Human law has no authority to contradict natural law or to violate fundamental principles of conduct. Such usurpation, in Aquinas' opinion, would upset the whole scheme of cosmic government.

The power of civil authority is to be limited specifically, he averred, in so far as certain fundamental rights of citizens are concerned. The life and property of free men must be strictly respected by the rulers. In the same way, slaves and Jews should be safeguarded in so far as they, too, enjoy the protection of the natural law. Thus, children of Jews should not be baptized without the permission of their parents. Any such action would run counter to the natural right of a father to decide for his offspring. The higher realm of natural law has ascendancy and priority over positive human legislation in Aquinas' legal theory. Only the laws that spring out of the rational will of the lawgiver are valid, but if they are decided by mere caprice or arbitrary decision they become symptoms and instruments of injustice. The king, therefore, cannot do just as he likes, for his laws are supposed to substantiate justice.

This insistence upon the claims of justice was a fundamental feature of legal theorizing in the Middle Ages. *Canon, feudal, and civil lawyers agreed that laws were superior to political authority and*

*that the king was bound to observe them.* The sacred character of law corresponded to the awe with which the masses regarded the dogmas of the Church.

### TYPES OF GOVERNMENT

Thomas Aquinas divided governments into six types, which he further classified as being good or bad, just or unjust. The three types of bad government he found in demagoguery, oligarchy, and tyranny, while he considered the polity (restrictive democracy), aristocracy, and monarchy good types.

He preferred monarchy to the others because he regarded it as being consonant with the laws of nature and the idea that one God rules the world. The government by one ruler, he insisted, is best equipped to effect unity and peace and avoid incessant quarreling. But an arbitrary and oppressive ruler administers the worst type.

However, Aquinas held tyrannicide unallowable. The people have three alternatives when they are ruled by an arbitrary dictator: (1) they may depose him legally by electing somebody else; (2) they may appeal to a higher authority; (3) they may wait for the help of God. Certainly, his antirevolutionary attitude is indicative of the Scholastic mind. It vividly manifests the belief in the immediate government of the world by God as the source of all justice and as the eternal judge who punishes tyrants for their misdeeds.

In order to prevent tyranny Aquinas, following Aristotle, believed that a *limited monarchy* might be advisable. It would lead to the active participation of the aristocrats, he felt, and the common people would have a share in the government and be attentive to the maintenance of peace. In other words, by giving the people a limited voice in the government, the government could be assured of a more *permanent* existence.

### POLITICAL AIMS

According to Aquinas, the aim of both the society and the individual must be the same in that they should each seek to attain eternal beatitude and the vision of God. The state can only indirectly contribute to the attainment of eternal blessedness, since the Church, as the dispenser of the sacraments and as the visible institution of salvation, brings the individual into touch with the supernatural realm. Life on earth is directed towards the existence Beyond, and the state's task and responsibility is to prepare earthly conditions for heavenly happiness.

Specifically, Aquinas held, the fulfillment of peace must be the chief endeavor of the state. The ruler must provide for a vigorous defense against external foes and also maintain the unity of the government in internal matters. Peace, thus, means the same to the state as health means to the body. But war in certain cases is permissible, provided hostilities are initiated and carried on by the authority of the sovereign, who has both a just cause to defend and the intention of destroying evil.

Aquinas, in discussing the controversial war question, was far less utopian than earlier writers. There was no doubt in his mind that wars can have beneficial results and that one who dies for a just cause can partake of eternal happiness. However, he pointed out, the clerics should not be permitted to participate in military operations because of the sanctity of their office and the dangerous consequences which active warfare undoubtedly would have for their moral attitude.

The question emerges now—and it is one that has tormented many religious consciences—regarding moral standards in wartime. How can we reconcile the lofty commands and mandates of the Bible with the slaughter and bloodshed of military campaigns? Aquinas partially accepted the disparity between the ethical provisions of everyday life and wartime morals. It is permissible for the soldier to kill, according to Aquinas, if he acts under the command of his ruler and if the welfare of the whole group demands the death of the enemy. If the soldier is motivated, on the other hand, by mere personal feelings, or if he just wants to enrich himself, he is guilty of a grave sin. The opposing parties are bound by the same solemn moral obligations in war as in peace. They cannot break a promise or be dishonest. Yet, to conceal one's true intention is permissible, Aquinas contended, since this is part of the art of war and does not violate the laws of justice. If we read the second part of the *Summa theologiae* correctly, we can be sure that Thomas Aquinas would scarcely have been in favor of the treaty-breaking we have witnessed in our own days.

Consonant with the ritualistic spirit of the Middle Ages, Aquinas believed that even in wartime the sacred holidays of the Church are to be observed, as well as the customary prayers and other essential religious devotions. But in extreme emergencies, even on sacred holidays, battles may take place.

Another task of the state, he wrote, consists in the supply of material necessities for its citizens. This does not mean that the needy



should live off the state but that they should secure the help of their fellow citizens to prevent suffering and starvation. Furthermore, when a ruler founds a new city, he is to be very careful in selecting the locality and environment. A temperate climate and a fertile agricultural region are ideal for city development.

The state, Aquinas held, cannot take a laissez-faire attitude with regard to economic conditions but is obliged to maintain justice in economic relations as well as in legal matters. The ruler preferably should possess great wealth so that he may not be tempted to tax the people except under constitutional provisions and in times of great public danger. Also, the ruler is obliged to select suitable sites for schools and universities and to encourage and provide for a comprehensive system of education.

Aquinas found it characteristic of tyrants that they tend to suppress culture ruthlessly in order to prevent overthrow of their regime. Thus, even in the Middle Ages learned writers understood the positive correlation existing between tyranny and ignorance.

### MORALITY AND THE STATE

The immediate responsibility of civil authority, Aquinas taught, lies in the encouragement and protection of the virtuous life of the citizens. For this purpose laws are instituted, not only to prevent evil but also to inspire real ethical behavior. The state is to be a righteous guardian and a moral policeman. Aquinas condemned the wild desire for pleasure that makes citizens effeminate and brings about a general disintegration of propriety and rectitude. In this respect he was one with the founders of New England.

Religion and morals were tied closely together in the Middle Ages, and thus we understand Aquinas' belief that the moral behavior of the people could be fully developed only if the ruler respected and obeyed the representatives of religion and adhered strictly to the laws of the Church. It was the mission of the king to punish heretics and all those who violated the sanctuaries of the faith.

Aquinas took it for granted that the ultimate success of a ruler depends upon his moral virtues. The mark of a good sovereign is that he surpasses all in the excellence of his character. Wisdom, Aquinas averred, is especially useful for the sovereign, since the art of government requires most of all the use of reason. Next, the ruler should distinguish himself by a superior sense of justice and be imbued with a sincere fear of God and deference to the moral

laws. He should be temperate and chaste in his way of living and avoid, as a matter of course, any deeds of profanation, greediness, and impetuosity. What should be the incentive of the good sovereign? Neither honor nor glory should satisfy him, because he will reap the most valuable rewards in heaven.

Just as the position of the ruler in the state resembles the power of God over the universe, Aquinas declared, so the good king receives a more ample consideration from God than does the ordinary man. But the tyrant will be held accountable for his misdeeds by God and is certain to suffer a heavier punishment than the ordinary man.

John of Salisbury, in his *Polycraticus*, had compared the government of mankind to an organism in which the priests are the soul, the prince is the head, and the senate is the heart. Just as John of Salisbury elevated the power of the priest, so Thomas Aquinas placed the ecclesiastical state above the worldly state, because man aims primarily at the attainment of God.

### THE CHURCH

Thus in his religious philosophy Aquinas maintained that we cannot be saved without the intercession of the Church. The sacraments of the Church are valid, regardless of the moral qualities of the priest. They have two main purposes: first, to perfect man in the worship of God; and second, to prevent sin. He held that all the seven sacraments are necessary for salvation. Thus *baptism* governs the beginning of life, *confirmation* stands for man's growth, and the *eucharist* preserves the strength and spirit of man. Our sins are healed in two ways. By *penance*, through which we repent our wickedness, and by *extreme unction*, through which we prepare ourselves for eternal life. Furthermore, the sacraments have a social meaning. *Ordination* stands for the spiritual power of the priesthood, whereas *marriage* represents "not only a sacrament but an ordinance of nature." It indicates that we are aware of the divine governance of human reproduction.

In his religious philosophy Aquinas stressed the work of Jesus Christ. He showed how Christ serves as the mediator between man and God, and how through him forgiveness of sins, deliverance from Satan, and reconciliation with God are possible. In imitating Christ, man is not following a negative rule of life; rather, he is perfecting himself in the love of God and in complete spirituality. Can this spirituality be attained outside the Church? Can we achieve complete bliss apart from Catholicism? Aquinas answered in the

negative. Grace, he declared, is given not to the individual but to Christ as the head of the Church. It is administered by the priests, who are the representatives of God on earth.

In this way Aquinas defended the spirit of orthodoxy. In his work we find a complete formulation of Catholic philosophy. Avoiding any extremes, he was conscious of both God and man, of the body and the soul, of the intellect and the will, of reason and revelation. He built a bridge between these realms because he felt that the universe is governed by divine purposes.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Relate the salient events of Thomas Aquinas' life.
2. How did Aquinas defend the existence of God?
3. Describe the epistemological views of Aquinas.
4. What is the role of teleology in the system of Aquinas?
5. Why did Aquinas believe in the immortality of the soul?
6. Describe the traits of the ideal ruler according to Aquinas.
7. How did Aquinas defend the sacraments of the Church?
8. What were the ethical doctrines of Aquinas? What is your own evaluation of them?
9. What was his attitude toward heretics?
10. What were the scientific views of Aquinas?

## OPPONENTS OF AQUINAS

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### BASIS OF OPPOSITION

Opposition to the philosophy of Aquinas was based on both philosophical and personal reasons. Since Aquinas was a Dominican, many Franciscans naturally had a dislike for his views. We find that in 1277 the philosophy of Aquinas was condemned in Paris. The opposition was even stronger in England, and at Oxford his philosophy was almost outlawed.

Philosophically, the antagonism was so great because of the *intellectualism* of Aquinas. In general, he was little interested in intuition, for he did not believe in an inner light through which man can achieve certain knowledge. Refusing to accept the Augustinian system of epistemology, he relied mainly upon Aristotle's description of knowledge. Many thinkers believed that Aquinas depended too much on the Greek thinker and that he had introduced alien and inconsistent elements into the Christian faith. In rejecting the doctrine of substantial forms, he had negated the basis of much of earlier Scholasticism.

Another reason for the opposition was the rationalistic approach of Aquinas. Throughout the Middle Ages many scholars followed

St. Bernard and believed that faith is to be accepted as the starting point of all human endeavor. Philosophy, thus, was viewed as an insignificant subject which could not contribute anything to the perfection of religion. In their opinion, Aquinas had relied too much on natural theology and not enough on guidance by the concepts of revelation. Still, the philosophy of Aquinas triumphed, and in 1323 Pope John XXII canonized him.

What were the reasons for his victory? Why has his system become the official philosophy of the Catholic Church? There are several answers to explain Aquinas' great popularity.

First of all, the dominance of Aquinas was due to his systematic presentation. To read his works is to receive an impression of order, simplicity, and truly encyclopedic knowledge. Even those who disagree with him are struck, generally, by his objectivity and his fairness in handling controversial problems.

Another reason was the orthodoxy of Aquinas. He did not believe that man alone can find God, but that the intercession of the Church is absolutely necessary. He gave a clear formulation to the sacramental system and throughout his life defended the powers of the papacy.

Another trait which increased his popularity was his moderation. Thus, while he believed asceticism to be the best way of life, he had an understanding of the problems of matrimony and made the family system central in his ethical philosophy.

Furthermore, there was a humanistic element in his system. This does not imply that he believed man the center of life; on the contrary, he regarded God as the source and end of all Being. Still, he was aware of the physical and spiritual needs of human nature.

In addition, Aquinas' starting point was empirical. Thus, his theories later on could be combined with the researches of modern science. Consequently he became the patron saint of the Neo-Scholastic movement which in the 20th century added new vitality to Catholic philosophy.

The philosophers who followed Aquinas modified his theories. Many, like Duns Scotus (*c.* 1266-1308), rejected the fundamentals of his belief, yet almost all of them remained faithful to the Catholic Church.

## HENRY OF GHENT

The life story of Henry of Ghent (died 1293) indicates that he was a prominent member of the university of Paris. He taught theology

and in many ways modified the theories of Aquinas. He was more Augustinian than Aquinas and stated that final truth can be found only through the divine light which is infused by God into the human mind.

As a voluntarist, Henry of Ghent was opposed to the intellectualism of Aquinas. The intellect, he felt, is passive whereas the will is constantly active; consequently, the will is master of the intellect.

### GODFREY OF FONTAINES

Godfrey of Fontaines, like Henry of Ghent, taught theology in Paris, where he was regarded as an outstanding member of the faculty. He was interested not merely in philosophy but also in law, and he was active in political life. Although supporting the Thomist philosophy when it was condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities in Paris, he was not an unqualified supporter of Aquinas.

Unlike Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines believed the will to be subordinate to the intellect. He thought that the will is completely dependent upon man's reason and inevitably conditioned by his understanding.

In his concept of individuation, he opposed the views of Aquinas that it can be found in matter. It is due, Godfrey suggested, to the substantial form. Aquinas had asserted God can know individuals, but Godfrey felt God knows only species, which, however, give him a clear knowledge of all particular things.

### JOHN PECKHAM

Peckham was one of the foremost opponents of the philosophy of Aquinas. A student of Bonaventura, he taught at the university of Paris and later at Oxford. In 1279 he became archbishop of Canterbury.

Following earlier Scholasticism, Peckham maintained that the soul is composed of both matter and form. He believed in the doctrine of the plurality of substantial forms and refused to accept the simplified theory of Aquinas, who, as we remember, had rejected the view that a plurality of forms exists.

In his epistemology Peckham asserted man has a *direct* knowledge of God. He stressed the reality of divine illumination. We can have certainty in knowledge, he declared, for intuition, which is part of the grace of God, is entirely reliable.

Like Henry of Ghent, Peckham felt the will to be superior to the intellect. Consequently, he was more concerned with man's

emotions and actions than with his knowledge. To find God, then, man's character is more significant than his philosophical understanding.

As a fervent opponent of Aquinas, Peckham boasted that at a public disputation he had defeated him and won an acknowledgment of error. Others, however, point out the falsity of this statement—Aquinas had merely shown immense self-control in not being belligerent when attacked by Peckham.

### RICHARD OF MIDDLETON

Richard of Middleton also taught theology at Paris. A member of the Franciscan order, he later went to Naples to take charge of the education of the son of Charles II. He tried to combine the philosophies of Bonaventura and Aquinas. In his own philosophy he followed the earlier Scholasticism in identifying the soul with its faculties, but he adhered to Aquinas in not accepting the ontological argument for the existence of God and in rejecting the doctrine of seminal reasons.

In his epistemology he opened the door to nominalism for, he asserted, universals do not have an objective existence in nature, and only individuals are real. Science, consequently, cannot give us a picture of immaterial things, for science deals with abstractions. However, this nominalistic view of science did not undermine Richard's faith, for he believed man, through intuition and reliance on faith, can find God.

### RAYMOND LULLY

Raymond Lully was born c. 1235. He was an excellent student of Arabic, and his main ideal was to convert the Mohammedans to Christianity and to extinguish the Averrhoist heresy. He was a teacher at Paris and also a missionary to Mohammedan countries. During one of his missionary endeavors in 1315, he was stoned to death by Mohammedans.

In Lully the rationalistic ideal was dominant. Reason, he believed, could prove the truths of the Catholic doctrines and show all other philosophies and religions to be based on falsehood. He opposed the view of Averrhoes that something can be true in philosophy but false in religion. On the contrary, he felt that the realm of faith and revelation cannot be separated from that of natural theology.

Historically, he is important because he tried to reduce philosophy to a system of *logical principles*. He developed a logical machine,

which represented his faith that ideas can be manipulated through geometrical letters and that mathematical concepts represent the principles of reality.

Later, Leibniz in many ways tried to do the same by developing a universal method for philosophy. Since Lully, philosophers have attempted to use mathematical symbols as the keys to reality and in this way get away from the vicissitudes of linguistic conventions.

### AVERRHOISM

Throughout the 13th and 14th centuries the faithful philosophers fought a bitter war with the Averrhoist doctrines. The Averrhoists felt they had interpreted more faithfully the original meaning of Aristotle than had the Scholastics, and they frequently arrived at conclusions which could not be combined with the dogmas of Christianity. Among their principles we find especially the view that philosophy and theology are separate sciences and that reason is superior to faith. Certain principles, they claimed, may be taught to the masses, who will accept them on the basis of authority, but philosophers will exhibit their independence in discussing and explaining the principles of reality. Unlike the Scholastics, they did not believe reason and faith to be consistent. In this way, they shattered the foundation of medieval certainty.

Generally, in their philosophy the Averrhoists adhered to *deterministic* principles. Not only do celestial beings influence the creatures on earth, they averred, but man's moral actions cannot be explained on the basis of free will. Mainly, they tried to give a scientific explanation of ethical ideals and thus negated the indeterministic view of the Scholastics.

Much opposition was caused, also, by their rejection of personal immortality. Following Averrhoes, whom they regarded as an inspired prophet, they believed only the active intellect to be immortal. Since the active intellect is truly universal and does not contain any taint of individuality, when we die personal desires and personal feelings are obliterated. This view, to some extent, anticipated the Spinozistic doctrine of immortality.

Just as heretical as its doctrine of immortality was the Averrhoist doctrine of creation. Accepting the eternity of the universe and believing in emanation, the Averrhoists in their world-view negated the Biblical foundation of Scholasticism. Thus they limited the power of God and generally adhered to an impersonal rather than a personalistic philosophy.



The outstanding philosopher of this group was Siger of Brabant, who was a Master of Arts at the university of Paris. His philosophy was the object of frequent attacks by the orthodox Scholastics. The Inquisition was concerned with his teachings, and in 1277 he was forbidden to instruct the students at Paris. His appeal to Rome was in vain. He died very tragically, assassinated by one of his own students.

Siger, one of the outstanding commentators on Aristotle, felt that Aquinas had misunderstood the meaning of the Greek thinker. Following the Aristotelian philosophy, Siger showed that the universe is eternal and personal immortality merely an illusion.

### DUNS SCOTUS

One of the most learned of medieval philosophers was Duns Scotus, who, like Siger of Brabant, was critical of Aquinas but remained within the bounds of orthodoxy. We know only a few facts about his life. Some believe he was born in 1266; others, in 1274. Scotland is thought to have been his birthplace. He became an eminent teacher at Oxford, where he remained for some time, and then he changed his residence and went to Paris. Afterwards he instructed at Cologne, where he died in 1308.

Although Duns Scotus passed away while he was still quite young, he produced a multitude of books. The best-known of them are his commentary on Peter Lombard, the *Opus Oxoniense*, and the *Reportata Parisiensia*. In his philosophy, he narrowed the domain of reason and, instead, stressed the essential supremacy of faith.

In Scotus we find an emphasis on *a priori* principles. Being interested in mathematics, he held that only *a priori* demonstrations can give us certainty. *A posteriori* arguments, on the other hand, he regarded as less significant, for they establish merely probability instead of certainty. In his theory of knowledge he asserted that thought represents an external reality. Thus he opposed a skeptical philosophy.

Duns Scotus showed, first, that certainty can be gained through the understanding of universal principles:

"With reference to certitude of *principles* I say this: that the terms of principles known through themselves have such an *identity*, that one term known *evidently* includes the other necessarily; and therefore the understanding compounding those terms, from the fact that it apprehends them, has in itself the *necessary* cause of the *conformity* of that act of compounding to the terms themselves of

which the composition is, and likewise the *evident* cause of that conformity; and therefore, that conformity is evident to it necessarily. . . . But this conformity of composition to terms is the *truth of composition*: therefore, the composition of such terms can not stand unless there is truth, and thus the perception of that composition and the perception of terms can not stand, unless the perception of conformity of composition to terms stands and thus the perception of truth, for the first percepts obviously include the perception of that truth."<sup>1</sup>

Second, certainty can be gained through experience: "Concerning the second type of knowables, namely concerning things known through experience, I say that although experience is not had of all singulars, but of a large number, and that although it is not always had, but in a great many cases, still one who knows by experience knows infallibly that it is thus, and that it is always thus, and that it is thus in all, and he knows this by the following proposition reposing in the soul, *whatever occurs as in a great many things from some cause which is not free, is the natural effect of that cause*, which proposition is known to the understanding, even though it had accepted the terms of it from erring senses; for *a cause which is not free* can not produce *as in a great many things, an effect* to the opposite of which it is ordered, or to which it is not ordered by its form: but a casual cause is ordered to the producing of the opposite of the casual effect or to not producing it; therefore, nothing is the casual cause in respect to an effect produced frequently by it, and if it is not free, it is a natural cause.

"That, however, this effect occurs by such a cause, producing *as in a great many cases*, this must be learned through experience; for to discover such a nature at one time with such an accident, at another with such another accident, it must be discovered that, howsoever great might be the diversity of such accidents, such an effect always followed that nature; therefore, such an effect follows not through some accident accidentally of that nature, but through the very nature in itself."<sup>2</sup>

Third, certainty can be gained through our actions: "And as there is certitude concerning waking as concerning something known through itself, so likewise of many other actions which are in our power, as that I understand, that I hear, and thus of others which

<sup>1</sup> *Commentaria Oxoniensia ad iv. libros magistri sententiarum* (McKeon, *Selections from medieval philosophers*, II, pp. 324-325).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

are perfect acts; for although there is no certitude that I see white which is located without, either in such a subject or at such a distance, because an illusion can be caused in the medium or in the organ and in many other ways, nevertheless there is certitude that I see, even though an illusion be caused in the organ, which illusion in the organ seems to be the greatest of illusions, as for example, when an act is caused in the organ itself, not by a present object, but such as is made naturally by a present object. And thus the faculty would have its act, if such an illusion or passion were supposed, and that would truly be what is called vision there, whether it be action, or passion, or both. But if the illusion were not caused in the organ itself, but in something proximate to it, which seems to be the organ, as, if the illusion were not caused in the concurrence of nerves, but if the impression of the species such as is naturally made by the object were caused in the eye itself, still sight would see; because such a species, or what is naturally seen in it, would be seen, for it would have sufficient distance with respect to the organ of sight, which is in the concurrence of those nerves, as is evident from Augustine in Book VI *On the Trinity*, chapter 2, because the remains of things seen, remaining in the eye when the eyes are closed, are seen; and according to the Philosopher *On sense and the sensed*, because the fire which is generated by the violent elevation of the eye and which is multiplied as far as the closed eyelid, is seen; these are true visions, although they are not the most perfect visions, because there are here sufficient distances of the species to the principal organ of sight."<sup>3</sup>

In his doctrine of universals Duns Scotus held that while we start with particulars, science inevitably is concerned with universal terms. The most important universal term, he maintained, is the concept of Being. Regarding the principle of individuation, he believed that it is not matter as Aquinas had supposed or substantial forms as Bonaventura believed, but that it is caused by the "thisness" (*haecceitas*) of things. This quality represents an immanent form in the species.

In Duns Scotus the *will* plays an important role. He asserted that the will of God is absolute. Morality, according to him, is based on the divine will. We do not gain perfection simply through intellectual knowledge but, rather, through the exercise of our *moral* capacities. He emphasized that action is more significant than contemplation, and he identified action with the will.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

In every way Duns Scotus rejected the intellectualism of Aquinas. Since the will commands intelligence, he wrote, both virtue and vice are connected with our voluntaristic capacities.

To Duns Scotus, God, above all, was the supreme lawgiver. Any disobedience on man's part is rigorously punished by God. It is not for us to question the decrees of God; rather, we must without reservation observe his commandments. Since the will of God is absolutely free, God could have established any kind of moral order. For example, he could have legalized murder and made injustice the law of life. How do we know, then, what is right and what is wrong? How do we understand what is virtuous and what is wicked? Duns Scotus answered in the traditional way: We must follow the Bible and be guided by the Church.

Can God will anything? Can he establish a universe which is completely inconsistent? There is only one exception, according to Duns Scotus. God cannot violate the *law of contradiction*. Thus, in God's perfection he cannot tolerate other gods. Furthermore, his majesty demands that all evil actions of man be punished and his good deeds rewarded.

In his technical philosophy Duns Scotus disagreed with Aquinas in his view that all created beings, including angels, have both matter and form. He spoke of various types of matter. Furthermore, he rejected the view of Aquinas that the existence of God can be based on the argument from motion.

The main difference between the two philosophers lies not so much in their technical principles as in their general outlook. Duns Scotus was a voluntarist. To him, the practical life, the life of action, was all-important. To Aquinas salvation consisted essentially in an act of contemplation, whereby man achieves a view of God; to Scotus salvation was achieved through an act of the will, which he regarded as far more sublime than contemplation.

Still, we must not minimize the similarities between Scotus and Aquinas, for both believed there is no essential difference between faith and reason, although Scotus narrowed the domain of reason. Both rejected the Augustinian viewpoint that knowledge consists in divine illumination; both were opposed to the Averrhoist philosophy and rejected philosophical skepticism.

What is the permanent significance of Duns Scotus? What is his essential contribution to philosophy? First, he taught the supremacy of the will. As is frequently pointed out, in this view he almost anticipated Immanuel Kant, but it must be remembered that Kant

believed in the autonomy of morality whereas Duns Scotus practically returned to Tertullian in emphasizing the majesty of God. Second, he taught a doctrine of unconditional obedience; what God commands must be followed by us even though our reason cannot understand it. Rebellion against the will of God is a great sin. In Duns Scotus' works God is explained in a far more arbitrary manner than in the system of the other Scholastics.

Third, Duns Scotus narrowed the realm of philosophy. The most important subject to him, consequently, was theology, which reveals to us the purposes and goals of life. Theological principles, he taught, must be accepted on the basis of faith; reason cannot disprove the validity of the dogmas of religion. He made it clear, incidentally, that theology is an *eminently* practical subject, for it shows how salvation can be attained.

Fourth, Duns Scotus was important as a critic. Frequently he indicated the inadequacy of previous philosophical demonstrations. He was extremely subtle in his arguments and in his definitions. In fact, occasionally his writing is so involved and technical that it is very difficult to understand.

Duns Scotus almost supplied a death blow to Scholasticism. By narrowing the domain of reason, by pointing out the contradictions of the previous thinkers, and by making technical thought so complicated that it could be understood only by the few, he narrowed the entire basis of Scholasticism. More and more, its students felt this method of philosophy to be merely concerned with the manipulation of words and to lack organic vitality.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What caused the victory of Aquinas' philosophy?
2. Compare and contrast Duns Scotus with Thomas Aquinas.
3. In what ways was Duns Scotus like Bonaventura?
4. How did Duns Scotus describe God? Compare his view of God with that of Aristotle.
5. What was Duns Scotus' attitude toward intellectualism?
6. Why did Scotus regard theology as a practical science?
7. How did Scotus oppose Skepticism?
8. In what ways did the philosophy of Duns Scotus undermine Scholasticism?
9. Describe the philosophical achievement of Godfrey of Fontaines.
10. Which thinker do you prefer, Duns Scotus or Thomas Aquinas? Justify your answer.

## ROGER BACON

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### BACKGROUND

Unfortunately we have few reliable facts regarding Roger Bacon's background and his effect upon his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> Like Abelard, he suffered for his audacious views, which ran counter to the outlook of the Church; but his works, unlike those of his great predecessor, caused no storm of indignation in the circles of the orthodox. This was due to the universal sway of Scholasticism, the dominant intellectual religion of Bacon's time, which impressed the minds of his contemporaries.

Bacon's ultimate interests lay somewhere else. For him, metaphysics and dialectical arguments had a *secondary* importance. It is certain that he was by no means the only one who shunned the subtleties of the Scholastics. However, those who, like him, were interested in science, in experiments, and in the exact observation of nature were in the minority. Still, it would be a mistake to think that the men who devoted all their time to science were persecuted by the Church for their experimentations. They were regarded as char-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Charles, *Roger Bacon: sa vie, ses ouvrages, ses doctrines; Roger Bacon essays*, edited by A. G. Little.

latans and magic workers rather than as enemies of the established faith. The danger which came from their studies was less pronounced than that which threatened from the pens of renegade theologians.

Even Scholastics such as Albertus Magnus, the celebrated teacher of Thomas Aquinas, were engrossed in the study of nature. They carried on their research without deviating from the path of Church dogmas. It was thought that just as theology and philosophy could be fully harmonized, so theology and scientific studies might be combined with visible benefits to both.

## LIFE AND WORKS

Returning to the career of Roger Bacon, we find that we cannot establish the exact date of his birth. It is commonly assumed to be between 1210 and 1214, at Ilchester in Somerset, England. He belonged to a noble family. His brother seems to have been a wealthy man, but he, together with the other members of the family, subsequently suffered pecuniary loss and exile for loyalty to king Henry III in his struggles against the barons (1258-1265).

Bacon was able to attend the university of Oxford, where his relative Robert Bacon taught. There the Dominicans had established a school in 1221, and three years later the Franciscans followed their example. At Oxford, Roger Bacon could listen to the stimulating lectures of Edmund Rich, who was the first scholar in western Europe to comment on the *Sophistical refutations*, a book in Aristotle's logical treatise, the *Organon*.

Bacon also studied with Grosseteste, who surpassed the scholars of his day in his knowledge of the Greek language. Bacon bore witness to Grosseteste's scientific achievements, to his sincere interest in philology, and to his dislike for the incorrect translations of Aristotle. From him he inherited a desire for fluent mastery of Greek. In Bacon's physical treatises the influence of Grosseteste is unmistakable. To this bishop of Lincoln, Bacon owed much, and in his writings he paid tribute to the creative genius of his teacher.

At Oxford, Roger Bacon received instruction by professors who had a broad perspective, not only in theology and philosophy but also in languages and physical sciences. The scientific studies were part of Oxford's tradition.

From Oxford Bacon went to Paris, and he stayed there on several occasions. At Paris, Bacon could have received instruction from

Albertus Magnus and from his own countryman, Alexander of Hales. But he showed no trace of admiration for their theological labors and turned, instead, to the natural sciences cultivated by the Arabian scholars. Among them he found Avicenna, Averrhoes, and Alhazen especially to his liking.

Roger Bacon himself confessed "he learned more important truth beyond comparison from men of humble station, who are not named in the schools, than from all the famous doctors." In 1267 he claimed to have spent much money on secret experiments and on other things of interest to him. We find in him, then, an ardent devotion to study, a devotion compelling him to sacrifice his material goods in order to further his research.

After receiving the degree of Master of Arts at Paris, Bacon returned to Oxford and joined the Franciscan Order. Although this move eased the burden of his teachings, his liberty of expression was now limited because of the conservative policies of the Franciscans. When Bonaventura became the head of the Franciscans in 1257, he initiated a conservative policy pertaining to all publications, because the order was suspected of heresy.

In the years between 1256 and 1266 Roger Bacon lived in a state of semi-retirement conditioned by poor health. He does not seem to have taken an active interest in the affairs of the university. Still, he carried on difficult experiments in physics, particularly in optics and in astronomy, and kept on instructing boys in the natural sciences. These ten years were wisely spent and prepared him for more important tasks. In 1266 an event happened which appears to have been the turning point in his life: the Pope became attentive to his work.

The fame of Roger Bacon had spread to the ears of Guy de Foulques, the papal legate in England, and when De Foulques ascended the papal throne as Clement IV in 1265, he did not forget Bacon's extraordinary attainments. In the following year he wrote to the friar to send a copy of his works, urging secrecy and speed. Bacon was full of gratitude and extremely happy to have this unique opportunity. He explained to the Pope the difficulties he had been forced to overcome: poor health, a lack of assistants, lack of co-operation on the part of his superiors, and his own method of composition, which necessitated four or five drafts of his writings before he was satisfied. All these factors obstructed his work. He intimated that he might get more done if he received some money from the Pope.



Unfortunately, the manuscripts he was supposed to deliver were not ready, but within eighteen months he completed his three large treatises: the *Opus majus*, the *Opus minus*, and the *Opus tertium*. The *Opus minus* and the *Opus tertium* were intended to be introductions and summaries to the *Opus majus*, but in regard to some subjects such as alchemy they went into far greater detail. The style of the treatises is very lucid in contrast to the involved method of writing characteristic of the Scholastics.

The three books were designed to appeal to Clement's practical mind, to convince him of the salutary value of scientific studies, both for the leaders of the Church and for the masses. Roger Bacon wanted to bring about a complete change in emphasis in the educational curriculum, maintaining that the subjects of the quadrivium were better designed as preparation for theology than were logic and rhetoric.

### BACON'S ORDEALS

Roger Bacon's idealistic hopes, however, were not realized. It is questionable whether the works sent to the Pope actually reached their destination; moreover, Clement IV died in 1268.

After the papal see had remained vacant for three years, Gregory X was elevated to this august position; but since he owed his election to Bonaventura, he showed no favors to Bacon, who was at odds with the policy of his order. We can imagine Bacon's disappointment. In 1272 he wrote an acrimonious treatise, the *Compendium studii philosophiae*, which gave vent to his bitterness. No one was left untouched by his invective. He lashed the corruption of the clergy, including the Pope, who, he said, set a bad example. He claimed the disintegration of the secular morals was due to the example of the Church. He attacked with even greater force the shallowness, the false presumptions, and the incapacity of the Scholastics, particularly their blind reliance upon the untrustworthy translations of Aristotle.

The reaction against the audacious voice of Bacon came several years later. In 1277 he was summoned to the chapter of the Franciscan Order in Paris; and the minister general Jerome of Ascoli, who had succeeded Bonaventura, by "the advice of many friars condemned and reprobated the teaching of Friar Roger Bacon of England, master of sacred theology, as containing some suspected novelties, on account of which the same Roger was condemned to prison." There were other causes responsible for the imprisonment

of Roger Bacon. That he was suspected of having taught magic arts was less punishable than his continued attacks on the Dominicans and members of his own order and his defense of the Arabian scholars. He had offended the prominent scholars of his day, and his powerful friend and protector, Grosseteste, the bishop of Lincoln, who could have helped, had died in 1253.

Bacon languished in prison until 1292, when the new minister general of the order set him free. In the same year he wrote the *Compendium studii theologiae*, but because of his imprisonment he was unable to complete his *Scriptum principale*, which was intended to be the encyclopedic summary of his studies. We do not know whether Roger Bacon died in 1292 or 1294; we are certain, however, that he was buried in the Franciscan Chapel at Oxford.

### SCIENTIFIC PHILOSOPHY

Bacon's death caused scarcely a ripple in the intellectual world, and up to the 16th century only three of his minor works were printed. The obscurity of his life and his labors in science, together with his aloofness from the affairs of his day, caused his name to be linked with magic. This impression of Bacon dominates Robert Greene's play, *Honourable history of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. Greene had found a very popular theme which already had been worked out in the Middle Ages. Few of the great scholars like Gerbert of Aurillac, Albertus Magnus, and Roger Bacon escaped the suspicion of possessing magical powers. Such a view can be understood by virtue of the superstitious bent of the times. But the picture of Bacon as a superman who never accepted the tendencies of the Middle Ages, as a modern in his ideals, is less excusable. We shall see that Roger Bacon in many ways suffered from the limitations of his own age, and that his ultimate aspirations aimed not at the overthrow of theology as "the queen of sciences" but at the establishment of a more solid and durable foundation for Christian theology.

Roger Bacon took part in the debates on the subjects foremost in the minds of the Scholastics. He, too, took a stand, for example, on the problem of universals. He combated the pantheistic tendencies of Averrhoism. Even his *Opus majus* contains much metaphysical ballast.

All this was not merely incidental to Roger Bacon's work in other fields; it formed an attempt at orientation amidst divergent intellectual currents. A modern scientist, without being interested in the technical problems of philosophy, would adopt a certain kind of

world-view necessary for classifying and unifying his own discoveries and theories. Such was Bacon's position towards nominalism. One individual, he maintained, "is of more account than all the universals in the world." Had not God created the world for the sake of individual persons rather than for universal man? Furthermore, individuals can be observed; there is something substantial about them. Science, thus, could only progress in the direction of *nominalism*.

When Roger Bacon discussed such a problem, vital for his world-view, one feels that he did not merely perform a good piece of verbal shadow-boxing. On the contrary, he showed little patience with logical subtleties and with abstract concepts which could not be verified by observation and experiments. He told his students: "Look at things, try them, see how they act on you, how you act on them. As to the matter and form that may underlie them, leave that to God."

It seems to be a well-established fact that Roger Bacon accepted the official dogmas of the Church. He did not doubt the absolute authority of the Scriptures, provided a pure text could be found. Like Abelard, he did not believe in the infallibility of the Church fathers, for he knew they were limited in their knowledge. However, this independent view was in complete accord with the opinions of the famous Scholastic doctors. The *Sic et non* of Abelard had caused a storm of indignation, but a century later such writing would have produced no sentence of excommunication nor hardships for its author.

Although Roger Bacon blamed the incorrect translations of Aristotle for much of the misunderstanding of his doctrines, he regarded him as the "great" philosopher and quoted frequently from his works. This regard, however, did not prevent him from disagreeing when the occasion arose.

Bacon's respect for the ancient philosophers was great. That they were not Christians made no difference to him. He preferred Seneca's moral teachings to the doctrines of the Christian teachers and stressed the purity and integrity of the ancient philosophers. Even the Mohammedan thinkers got their share of praise for their excellence and accuracy in scientific observation.

For Bacon, the summit of the Scholastic mountain was theology. He advocated that children obtain a thorough instruction in the Bible rather than in the current "fables of Ovid" because he thought the latter harmful to the faith. Convinced of the practical value of

the sciences, he wanted them applied chiefly to pious instruction in order to raise the level of religious contemplation and to destroy the faith of infidels. His view of the sciences as supporters and pillars of Scriptural revelation would have strengthened the unity and solidarity of Christianity. Like other medieval scientists, he emphasized the point that sin constituted a formidable obstacle to the mastery of science.

Bacon confused history with fable and mythology, showing no sense of discrimination and asserting, for example, that Prometheus was the "first teacher of philosophy and his brother Atlas the first great astrologer." We cannot blame Roger Bacon for such inaccuracies in historical knowledge, since history in the Middle Ages contained more fable than truth.

### BACON AND MEDIEVAL SCIENCE

Roger Bacon was limited in his researches by the methods and knowledge prevalent in his day. Science was based upon authority, revelation, and superstition. With the discovery of Aristotle's physical treatises, the sciences which in our day have become autonomous were entirely derived from Aristotle's writings. It took centuries to get rid of some of Aristotle's ideas, such as his belief that four elements make up the universe and his denial of the sexuality of plants. In medicine, the books of Galen were used, but the method of examination applied to the sick was unspeakably crude.

Revelation played an especially important role in medieval geography. Since people did not travel extensively in those days, they assumed that the world was extremely small. The book of *Genesis* in the Bible served as an authoritative and infallible guide for the geological structure of the earth.

It can be readily seen that the spirit of medieval science was characterized by the willing acceptance of superstitions. The belief that the stars and other celestial bodies exert an influence upon the destiny of human beings was accepted even in the most educated circles. It was thought that certain plants possess occult powers, and that by the use of herbs and other objects found in nature one might be able to coerce the supernatural spirits. Above all, alchemy occupied the minds of the medieval scientists. They attempted to transmute the base metals into gold and to find the philosopher's stone, which would act as a cure-all and reveal the secret of eternal youth.

We might dismiss all this as base superstition; yet we find astrology and alchemy contributing to the expansion of scientific knowl-

edge. That Roger Bacon was interested in alchemy and in astrology has been used to his disadvantage and to the disparagement of his genius. We must realize, however, that in the Middle Ages everything was linked with supernatural causes. Thus we find traces of astrology and alchemy in nearly every science during the Middle Ages.

### BACON'S CRITICISMS OF CONTEMPORARIES

Roger Bacon was profoundly critical of the knowledge possessed by his contemporaries. In the *Opus majus* he wrote about four stumbling blocks to the comprehension of truth, consisting of (1) frail and dubious authority; (2) long-established custom; (3) influence of the ignorant masses; and (4) hiding one's ignorance behind a show of wisdom. These stumbling blocks bear a close resemblance to the four Idols of Francis Bacon.

He became more specific when discussing the stumbling blocks of the theologians. To begin with, he asserted, philosophy dominates theology in practice. Theology should be less concerned with the things of nature than with the mysteries of the faith, such as the Trinity. But Roger Bacon did not stop there. He reproved the theologians for their ignorance and neglect of the "exact" sciences, such as optics, alchemy, mathematics, and philology. He believed that the Vulgate version of the Bible at Paris was extremely defective; hence, no one could get the correct literal meaning of the sacred text or its spiritual significance. He also fought a private war with translators, reproving them for ignorance of the meaning, content, and original language of the books which they had translated. Such was his adverse criticism of Gerard of Cremona, who had translated Euclid from the Arabic.

Bacon also lamented the state of education, with teachers turning their energies to speculation and to abstract theories instead of instruction in the practical sciences. When he remarked that he could teach a capable student in four years what he himself had learned in forty, he summarized the inefficiency of 13th-century teaching methods. He deplored, moreover, the sad neglect of sciences like optics and physics.

### THE NEW TECHNOLOGY

Roger Bacon was equipped with a constructive and visionary mind, and his critical inclination was overshadowed by ideals of possible

reforms. For instance, he pointed out that it was necessary to construct mathematical tables and instruments to make a correction in the calendar, since, he calculated, it had gained one day in each one hundred and thirty years.

His interests seem to have been extensive in the field of optics. He understood the laws of reflection and the phenomena of refraction; he described a telescope, besides experimenting with mirrors and lenses. Yet, when giving a description of the countries of the world, he accepted without question the view that the earth is the motionless center of the universe.

Although Bacon was not an inventor in the strict sense of the word, he envisaged and pictured many inventions which have come true in our day:

"Now that these matters are understood, I shall tell of certain marvels wrought through the agency of Art and of Nature, and will afterwards assign them to their causes and modes. In these there is no magic whatsoever, because, as has been said, all magical power is inferior to these works and incompetent to accomplish them. First, then, of mechanical devices.

"It is possible that great ships and sea-going vessels shall be made which can be guided by one man and will move with greater swiftness than if they were full of oarsmen.

"It is possible that a car shall be made which will move with inestimable speed, and the motion will be without the help of any living creature. . . .

"It is possible that a device for flying shall be made such that a man sitting in the middle of it and turning a crank shall cause artificial wings to beat the air after the manner of a bird's flight.

"Similarly, it is possible to construct a small-sized instrument for elevating and depressing great weights, a device which is most useful in certain exigencies. For a man may ascend and descend, and may deliver himself and his companions from peril of prison, by means of a device of small weight and of a height of three fingers and a breadth of four.

"It is possible also easily to make an instrument by which a single man may violently pull a thousand men toward himself in spite of opposition, or other things which are tractable.

"It is possible also that devices can be made whereby, without bodily danger, a man may walk on the bottom of the sea or of a river. Alexander (the Great) used these to observe the secrets of the sea, as Ethicus the astronomer relates.

"These devices have been made in antiquity and in our own time, and they are certain. I am acquainted with them explicitly, except with the instrument for flying which I have not seen. And I know no one who has seen it. But I know a wise man who has thought out the artifice. Infinite other such things can be made, as bridges over rivers without columns or supports, and machines, and unheard-of engines."<sup>2</sup>

Roger Bacon also experimented with burning glasses, gunpowder, the magnet, Greek fire, artificial gold, magic mirrors, and the philosopher's stone. Those subjects which are least important today as objects of scientific study, such as astrology and alchemy, Bacon thought most valuable. He lashed his contemporaries for not studying enough astrology and for not heeding the influence of the stars upon the conduct of their lives.

Even Thomas Aquinas did not deny that the celestial bodies exerted an indirect influence upon the lives of men without impairing freedom of the will. Roger Bacon stayed on the path of orthodoxy and left room for individual selection, but he was also convinced that astrology was an unexplored gold mine for the medieval scientist.

Bacon devoted much time and money to the drawing up of tables to show the correct constellations of the stars, "so that every day we could consider in the heavens the causes of all changes on earth, and find similar configurations of heaven in the past and similar effects; and calculate the same for the future. And so all things would be known."

Tables such as he proposed here would have little practical value, but, he thought, they would be worth a "king's treasure." Reared in the educational system of the Church, he looked to the heavens for the highest truths and there expected his scientific ideals to be realized.

Of course, Bacon was intensely interested in practical inventions, too, but they were less important to him than those which were marvelous and would confirm his religious beliefs. He did not occupy his time with experiments to make airplanes or motor-driven cars. He did not have the instruments necessary for them. Moreover, he did not consider them as "vital" as astrological tables, for the latter could prepare him and aid him in the attainment of the future life. In other words, the things which we regard today as practical were considered impractical in the Middle Ages. To Bacon, moral

<sup>2</sup> *Epistula de secretis operibus artis et naturae, et de nullitate magia*, 4.

philosophy and theology were more practical than science. Therefore he experimented a great deal with alchemy in order to find out how nature "tries ceaselessly to reach perfection—that is, gold."

### PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

Yet Roger Bacon was not a supporter of sweeping generalizations. He knew that natural science is complex and cannot be explained in terms of one hypothesis. Thus, in alchemy, he did not think of the elements as part of a universal primary nature or that it would be possible at all to reduce them to this indefinite principle, which for other alchemists continued to be the only existing reality in a world of appearances. Primary matter constituted, for them, a magic formula which would solve all the ills of the world. Bacon thought, on the contrary, that the purity of matter could only be restored by the harmonious blending of the elements. Now this would have been a more complex process. In the same way, he avoided a belief in the omnipotent sway of celestial bodies and left room for the action of *free will* in the individual.

Bacon's distrust of sweeping generalizations and his understanding of the complexity of the problems of natural science were influenced by his acceptance of the Church dogmas, his connection with Scholastic theology, and his conception of education. Theology and the Church teachings were highly complex in the 13th century. Many volumes were needed in order to clarify the facts of salvation. Catholic theology had become aware of an expansion of knowledge. It had assimilated, or attempted to assimilate, teachings propagated by infidels and unbelievers. It was a difficult task to harmonize advanced philosophy with the simple tenets of the faith. In order to accomplish this, one had to know a great deal of philosophy. Likewise, the scientists of the Western world became aware of a body of knowledge accumulated by the Arabian scholars which opened up a multitude of new problems, resulting in an extension of speculation and experimentation. The scientific researches of the Arabs had to be harmonized with the articles of the Christian religion.

Roger Bacon assumed that the truth of science could not disturb the calm equilibrium of his religious faith. His ideal was to use the weapon of the infidels—scientific study—for their own destruction. Ultimately, he believed that Christianity would not conquer the world by force but convert the infidels by the strength of marvelous arguments based upon exact experimentation which would verify the miracles of Christian revelation.



Although Bacon made some exaggerated claims about his ability to impart knowledge to his students and about the ineptitude of contemporary teachers, these should not be construed to imply that in his opinion the road to knowledge is an easy one. On the contrary, he wanted a more intricate and analytic system of instruction to supplement the current knowledge of Latin, grammar, logic, and metaphysics with a comprehensive study of the natural sciences. He attacked the friars who ventured to study theology without sufficient preparation. If anything, he envisaged an educational procedure more difficult, more complete, and more factual than that of his own time.

In his systematic theories Bacon was well ahead of his contemporaries. For example, he formed the conjecture that the transit of light from the stars occupies time, though we cannot perceive it, and he supported the view of the sphericity of the earth—a theory which indirectly influenced Columbus.

However, Bacon was seldom original. He frequently acknowledged his debt to his predecessors, especially to Aristotle and the Arabs. At times he seemed to be borrowing from the extensive work of his teacher, Grosseteste. But this borrowing does not imply that he could not apply the facts. His power in application, rearrangement, and combination of previously established facts was unsurpassed in the Middle Ages. His imagination in regard to the possibilities of science rivaled that of Dante in the field of poetry. In this manner he overcame the limitations of his own day and of his own bitter fortunes. It is difficult to draw a line where Bacon's imagination stops and the mystic spirit starts, for he did not always remain on the solid ground of experience but aspired to find the higher realm of religious visions. He did not believe in religion in order to demonstrate his orthodoxy; a sincere belief in the doctrines of the faith was part of his nature and his Franciscan environment.

To counteract the monopolization of education by dialectic and metaphysics, Roger Bacon urged the study of languages and mathematics. He was convinced of the utility of such study for the secular rulers and for the Church; languages he considered indispensable for the student who wanted to read original texts of theology and philosophy. Especially, he commended the study of Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic and, therefore, composed a Greek and Hebrew grammar to facilitate the instruction of students. The highest stage of linguistic learning, he declared, is to speak a foreign language with the same facility as the mother tongue. A second degree of proficiency

is the ability to translate it, and a lower stage of linguistic knowledge is the mere capacity to understand it. For a student this last capacity would be sufficient, but it was Roger Bacon's ideal to master Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic like his mother tongue. There is no proof that he succeeded; it is doubtful whether he was much better than the translators whose ignorance he decried. They, however, were in a better position to travel in foreign lands and learn the languages as they were actually spoken.

Bacon's ideal was realized to some extent at the council of Vienne in 1312. There the establishment of schools of Oriental languages was ordered in the universities of Paris, Oxford, Bologna, and Salamanca. Unfortunately, the decree of the council proved to be unsuccessful. The students did not respond to the new courses; the teachers were underpaid and half-starving; thus, there existed no strong stimulus for either teacher or student to devote himself to this field of research.

For Roger Bacon the study of philology possessed another attraction in the mystic power of words. He pondered about the "tyranny of words" from the standpoint of their magical value in coercing supernatural forces. His ideal was to get ultimately to the root of the spiritual meaning of the Bible. He envisaged a revision of the Bible, which had become invalid through many changes and poor translations. This revision was to be carried out by a papal commission composed of outstanding scholars.

### *MATHEMATICS AS THE FOUNDATION OF SCIENCE*

Mathematics Bacon prized even more highly than philology. He called it "the gate and key of the natural sciences, the alphabet of philosophy." In all sciences he found traces of mathematics, and he saw that the fundamental concepts in physical science, like matter and force, could be expressed by mathematical concepts. For him, mathematics replaced logic as the fundamental discipline. The objection which he had against logic was its abstraction and its faulty consideration of reality, because logic cannot give us absolute certainty. Moreover, he claimed that we do not need instruction in this field because we have a natural grasp of it and need learn only its technical terms.

This point of view represents Bacon's reaction against excessive reliance upon argumentation. We can scarcely imagine to what extent logic dominated the instructional program of medieval univer-

sities. It was no accident that the masters of logic were the most arrogant, self-satisfied, and dogmatic teachers of the age. They looked down upon experimentation and observation of natural phenomena. If Bacon could have replaced logic with mathematics, or at least subordinated it, it would have been a revolutionary change. He could not, for logic was too solidly entrenched in the universities.

### EXPERIMENTAL SCIENCE

Nevertheless, Roger Bacon did not arrive at any striking results in his study of mathematics. What mattered was his appreciation and understanding that mathematics forms the key to the physical sciences, and in this respect he resembled Descartes. But he also recognized the fact that mathematics cannot be the noblest natural science even though it is fundamental. For him, the queen of the natural sciences was the *scientia experimentalis*, experimental science. Established on the twin pillars of mathematics and experience, it has a most durable foundation.

Now experimental science has three prerogatives: (1) it confirms conclusions to which other scientific methods already point; (2) it distinguishes between truth and falsehood; (3) it creates new departments and methods of science.<sup>3</sup>

It would be wrong to say, however, that Roger Bacon resembled the modern research scientist, for he experimented with many subjects, such as alchemy, which are unrelated to exact measurement. He expected marvelous results from his experiments but lacked the impartiality with which a modern scientist approaches his field of study. Finally, he relied too much upon the validity of the sense organs and did not sufficiently appreciate the need for exact verification.

What is the function of the experimental method? How can it be applied? Here Bacon showed most clearly his connection with the ideals prevalent in the Middle Ages. By the application of the experimental method he expected to arrive at a more exact understanding of the spiritual meaning of the Bible, to convert the infidels by proving the miracles of the Christian faith, to exterminate the errors of magic, and to meet the challenge of the Anti-Christ, who was expected to descend upon earth fully equipped with a knowledge of experimental science and of mechanical inventions. If one could

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Thorndike, "Roger Bacon and experimental method in the Middle Ages," *Philosophical review* (1914), pp. 271-298.

understand the secrets of nature, Bacon said, it would be easier to cope with the guile of Anti-Christ. "By studying the Bible, certain prophecies, and astronomy, the Church would be able to know the date and place of Anti-Christ's appearance."

We have emphasized the fact that Roger Bacon remained within the limits of orthodoxy. At the same time, he represented a change in ideals from the Patristic Age. The Church fathers had little patience with those who were bent upon experimenting and observing the working of nature, since these interests had little relation to the life Beyond, where man would live a different kind of existence. In the beauty of nature they saw the snares of the devil; and in anything which appeared mysterious and inexplicable, the work of demons or angels.

The otherworldly attitude of the Church prevented the advancement of the natural sciences in the Middle Ages. Progress in scientific study could only come from without, by the recovery of ancient writings. When these finally were introduced, together with the commentaries of the Arabian scholars, a new field of study was opened up.

An orthodox scholar like Roger Bacon believed that everything in the universe is reasonable and reflects the rationality of the Creator. Science thus becomes a confirmation of God's wisdom. Hence, in the *Opus majus*, after discussing the natural sciences, Bacon turned in the concluding chapter to moral philosophy, "nobler than all the other branches of philosophy." To him, scientific study did not constitute an end in itself; it formed an avenue to salvation and was definitely subordinated to the knowledge of God.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the major works of Roger Bacon?
2. Why was Roger Bacon regarded with suspicion?
3. Why was mathematics important to Roger Bacon?
4. In what ways did Roger Bacon criticize his contemporaries?
5. How did Roger Bacon view alchemy?
6. What are the obstacles preventing the progress of science, according to Bacon?
7. Describe Bacon's concept of experimental science.
8. What is the purpose of science, according to Roger Bacon?
9. In what way was Roger Bacon modern? In what ways was he medieval?
10. Describe the weaknesses of the Baconian world-view.

## MEISTER ECKHART

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### LIFE AND TIMES

**W**e do not know the exact date of Eckhart's birth, but it is believed to have been around 1260. His father was an overseer in the employ of one of the feudal lords, and thus Eckhart was able to obtain an excellent education. In his youth he entered the Dominican monastery. Later he studied at Cologne, where there were a number of illustrious theologians, including Albertus Magnus. There is no verification, however, for the belief that Magnus instructed Eckhart.

The religious career of Eckhart was spectacular. He became head of a monastery at Erfurt. In 1300 he was sent to Paris, where he championed the Dominican philosophy against that of the Franciscans. He used vigorous language, and from that period on he was opposed to Scholastic subtlety, which he thought alienated man from God. In 1302 he became Master of Theology. The following year he was appointed head of the Dominicans in Saxony, and four years later he became vicar of Bohemia. Administrative work continually sapped his energy, for he was constantly engaged in missions for his order.

In 1309 Eckhart was nominated to head the Dominican order in Germany, but because of his antagonism to the Franciscans he was not appointed. Three years later he returned to Paris and, in 1314, went to Strasbourg. Contemporary chroniclers speak of his amazing success as a preacher. Wherever he went crowds followed him. Many of his ideas were difficult to understand, almost incomprehensible, but the people admired his passionate sincerity and realized that he spoke not merely as a theologian but as a man of profound faith.

When, in 1320, Eckhart was appointed to teach at Cologne, his success seemed to be assured. He did not realize that he had entered the lions' den. The archbishop of Cologne, a Franciscan, had little love for the Dominican order and was greatly concerned about the spread of anti-ecclesiastical feeling in the Rhineland. Charges were made against Eckhart claiming that he negated the foundations of the Catholic faith. The Inquisition took over; at first Eckhart was acquitted. The acquittal, however, was due to the work of a Dominican, who naturally favored Eckhart. But the bishop was anxious to silence Eckhart, and so he appointed two Franciscans to continue the investigation. Eckhart submitted an eloquent defense to the judges, in which he categorically denied all the charges. A trial followed in 1327 in the archbishop's court. Like Abelard, Eckhart appealed to the Pope but was denied. Later, after his death, his views were sharply condemned by the Church. But the impact of his theories was felt by the proponents of the Protestant Reformation.

Among the influences on his work we find Boethius, Augustine, and Dionysius the Areopagite; incidentally, Neo-Platonism also found a ready reception in his system. Denifle, in his work on Eckhart, pointed out that many of his views are found in Aquinas. It is true that Eckhart quoted frequently from Aquinas, but his emphasis was quite different, for he was less orthodox in his views than the official philosopher of the Catholic Church.

In his Biblical studies, Eckhart leaned especially upon the Wisdom Literature, and he had a great fondness for the Fourth Gospel. His view of faith was like that of St. Paul except that his philosophical training was far more extensive than the apostle's.

Among Eckhart's works we find his early treatise, *The talks of instruction*, especially significant. In his mature years he wrote the *Book of divine comfort*, which he dedicated to the queen of Hungary. His treatise *About disinterest* and his sermons, likewise, are noteworthy. For a full understanding of Eckhart we might also in-

clude his Latin work, the *Opus tripartitum*, and his *Defense*, in which he replied to the charges of the archbishop.

### ECKHART'S CONCEPT OF GOD

Like the Neo-Platonists, Eckhart stated that God in his essence is completely incomprehensible. Thus we cannot attribute any qualities to the Godhead. When we use theological terms we are only applying symbols, not terms which have a corresponding reality. Since God is completely immovable and disinterested, he is not affected by the Creation.

"Bear in mind also that God has been immovably disinterested from the beginning and still is and that his creation of the heavens and the earth affected him as little as if he had not made a single creature. But I go further. All the prayers a man may offer and the good works he may do will affect the disinterested God as little as if there were neither prayers nor works, nor will God be any more compassionate or stoop down to man any more because of his prayers and works than if they were omitted.

"Furthermore, I say that when the Son in the Godhead willed to be human and became so, suffering martyrdom, the immovable disinterest of God was affected as little as if the Son had never become human at all."<sup>1</sup>

The objection may be raised that according to this theory God is not interested in man. Eckhart, however, showed this to be an incorrect view.

"Now pay close attention and understand what I mean, if you can. When God first looked out of eternity (if one may say that he ever *first* looked out), he saw everything as it would happen and at the same time he saw when and how he would create each thing. He foresaw the loving prayers and the good deeds each person might do and knew which prayers and which devotions he would heed. He foresaw that tomorrow morning you will cry out to him in earnest prayer and that tomorrow morning he will not heed you because he had already heard your prayer in his eternity, before you became a person; and if your prayer is neither honest nor earnest, he will not deny it now, for it is already denied in eternity. In that first eternal vision, God looked on each thing-to-be and therefore he does what he now does without a reason. It was all worked out beforehand.

<sup>1</sup> Meister Eckhart, *a modern translation*, by Raymond Blakney, p. 85. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Brothers, New York.

"Still, even if God remains forever unmoved, disinterested, the prayers and good works of people are not lost on that account, for well-doing is never without its reward. Philippus says: 'God the Creator holds things to the course and order he ordained for them in the beginning.' To God there is neither past nor future and he loves the saints, having foreseen them before ever the world began. Then, when events, foreseen by God in eternity, come to pass in time, people think that God has taken a new departure, either to anger or toward some agreeable end; but it is we who change, while he remains unchanged. Sunshine hurts ailing eyes but is agreeable to sound ones, and yet it is the same sunshine in both cases. God does not see through time, nor does anything new happen in his sight."<sup>2</sup>

Creation itself, according to Eckhart, is the result of a personal God who is different from the Godhead. This personal God is in active relationship with human beings. How then shall we love God? How shall we approach him? We must love him, Eckhart wrote, not because we expect rewards, not because we desire the pleasures of heaven, but because we see the oneness of the universe, for God is within us. In fact, all things are one—and part of God. Outside him, there is no real Being.

This doctrine means that the world process is almost like the one which Eriugena pictured. All things are created by God, and they tend to return to him. History, thus, contains an enormous cycle which shows that man cannot find himself apart from God.

Eckhart believed the kingdom of heaven can be found within man, *for God creates Christ in two ways: first, as part of the Trinity and, second, in the soul of man.* We find God thus not in outward acts, not through distant pilgrimages, but by turning our attention upon the reality of the soul. The human soul then is divine. It is not only a copy of divinity; rather, it is the container of the divine spark. The result is that man can know God *directly*. He does not have to depend upon theology or upon revelation. All that is necessary is to understand the union which binds him to the divine power and which reveals that God is in man.

The knowledge which man can achieve of God does not depend on the hereafter. Unlike Aquinas, Eckhart felt we can achieve the vision of God right here on earth, and thus we anticipate immortality. It is this vision and this feeling of union which constitute the climax and the fulfillment of our existence.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86.



## THE MORAL IDEAL

To achieve the knowledge of God, Eckhart taught, it is necessary to be pure in spirit. We must abandon personal property. God wants us to dedicate ourselves to him exclusively and to give up all other interests.

"His chief delight and fun consist of this and the more exclusively he can be our own the greater his joy is. Thus the more things we keep for ourselves, the less we have his love; the less we own things, the more we shall own him and his. When our Lord went to speak of things that are blessed, he put poverty of spirit at the top of the list and that shows that all blessings and perfection begin with being 'poor in spirit.' In fact that is the only foundation on which any good may rest; otherwise [what seems good is] nothing at all, neither this nor that. When we got rid of outward things, in return, God shall give us all that heaven contains, yes, heaven and all its powers, and all that flows out of God. Whatever the saints and angels have shall be ours as much as theirs.

"If, therefore, I deny myself, God will be mine much more than any thing could be; he shall be mine as much as his own, neither less nor more. He will be mine a thousand times more than any 'personal property one might own and keep in a safe. Nothing was ever owned to the degree that God may be my own, together with all that is his.'"<sup>3</sup>

We must learn to curb our desires. "He is far more blessed who gets along without things because he does not need them, than he who owns everything because he needs it all; but best of all is the person who can go without because he has no need. Those, therefore, who can dispense with more and scorn more will have denied themselves more. It looks like a great deed when, for God's sake, someone gives a thousand marks of gold to feed the poor and build convents and cloisters, but much more blessed is he who disdains that much stuff on account of God. A person really has the Kingdom of Heaven when he is wise enough to put off everything for the sake of God.

"To which you may say: 'Yes, sir, if only it were not for one thing—that my faults prevent me. . . .'

"If you have faults, then pray often to God to remove them from you, if that should please him, because you can't get rid of them yourself. If he does remove them, then thank him; but if he does

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

not, then bear them for him, not thinking of them as faults or sins, but rather as great disciplines, and thus you shall merit reward and exercise your patience; but be satisfied whether he gives you what you want or not. For he does give to each, according to what is best for him and what best fits the need. If a coat is to fit, it must be cut to measure, for what fits one will not fit another; each person must be measured if his coat is to fit."<sup>4</sup>

The most important virtue, according to Eckhart, is *Abgeschiedenheit*, or the abandonment of self. He put this disinterest on a higher plane than love.

"My first reason is as follows. The best thing about love is that it makes me love God. Now, it is much more advantageous for me to move God toward myself than for me to move toward him, for my blessing in eternity depends on my being identified with God. He is more able to deal with me and join me than I am to join him. Disinterest brings God to me and I can demonstrate it this way: Everything likes its own habitat best; God's habitat is purity and unity, which are due to disinterest. Therefore God necessarily gives himself to the disinterested heart.

"In the second place, I put disinterest above love because love compels me to suffer for God's sake, whereas disinterest makes me sensitive only to God. This ranks far above suffering for God or in God; for, when he suffers, man pays some attention to the creature from which his suffering comes, but being disinterested, he is quite detached from the creature. I demonstrate that, being disinterested, a man is sensitive only to God, in this way: Experience must always be an experience of something, but disinterest comes so close to zero that nothing but God is rarefied enough to get into it, to enter the disinterested heart. That is why a disinterested person is sensitive to nothing but God. Each person experiences things in his own way and thus every distinguishable thing is seen and understood according to the approach of the beholder and not, as it might be, from its own point of view."<sup>5</sup>

Disinterest creates a knowledge of God, Eckhart asserted. It is emancipated from physical and fleshly pleasures.

"Heed this, intelligent people: Life is good to the man who goes, on and on, disinterestedly. There is no physical nor fleshly pleasure without some spiritual harm, for the desires of the flesh are contrary to those of the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are contrary

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

to the flesh. That is why to sow the undisciplined love of the flesh is to be cut off by death, but to sow the disciplined love of the spirit is to reap of the spirit, life eternal. The less one pays attention to the creature things, the more the Creator pursues him.

"Listen to this, man of intelligence: If the pleasure we take in the physical form of Christ diminishes our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, how much more will the pleasure we take in the comfort of transitory things be a barrier against God? Disinterest is best of all, for by it the soul is unified, knowledge is made pure, the heart is kindled, the spirit awakened, the desires quickened, the virtues enhanced. Disinterest brings knowledge of God; cut off from the creature, the soul unites with God; for love apart from God is like water to a fire, while love with God is the honeycomb in the honey."<sup>6</sup>

The life which Eckhart advocated involves not merely contemplation but also active service. To retire from the world, to live apart from mankind, he considered inadequate. Since the ideal Christian does not despise the duties which life imposes, he will not be an isolationist. He will fulfill his vocation among his fellows.

Still, Eckhart was primarily concerned with the inner life, for to him the soul was the principle of reality. God is revealed through the fertility of the soul:

"Above all, claim nothing for yourself. Relax and let God operate you and do what he will with you. The deed is his; the word is his; this birth is his; and all you are is his, for you have surrendered self to him, with all your soul's agents and their functions and even your personal nature. Then at once, God comes into your being and faculties, for you are like a desert, despoiled of all that was peculiarly your own. The Scripture speaks of 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' Let this voice cry in you at will. Be like a desert as far as self and the things of this world are concerned."<sup>7</sup>

How can we achieve this state? Shall we just wait apathetically?

"This is the answer. External acts of virtue were instituted and ordained so that the outer man might be directed to God and set apart for spiritual life and all good things, and not diverted from them by incompatible pursuits. They were instituted to restrain man from things impertinent to his high calling, so that when God wants to use him, he will be found ready, not needing to be brought back from things coarse and irrelevant. The more pleasure one takes

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

in externalities the harder it is to turn away from them. The stronger the love the greater the pain of parting.

"See! Praying, reading, singing, watching, fasting, and doing penance—all these virtuous practices were contrived to catch us and keep us away from strange, ungodly things. Thus, if one feels that the spirit of God is not at work in him, that he has departed inwardly from God, he will all the more feel the need to do virtuous deeds—especially those he finds most pertinent or useful—not for his own personal ends but rather to honor the truth—he will not wish to be drawn or led away by obvious things. Rather, he will want to cleave to God, so that God will find him quickly and not have to look far afield for him when, once more, he wants to act through him.

"But when a person has a true spiritual experience, he may boldly drop external disciplines, even those to which he is bound by vows, from which even a bishop may not release him. No man may release another from vows he has made to God—for such vows are contracts between man and God. And also, if a person who has vowed many things such as prayer, fasting, or pilgrimages, should enter an order, he is then free from the vow, for once in the order, his bond is to all virtue and to God himself."<sup>8</sup>

Now, Eckhart pointed out, we can understand the road which leads to God. We must conquer all turmoil and strife, and we must get away from all external attachments. We must abandon the desire for pleasure, wealth, fame, and honor. Also, we must give up self-love and the desire for social advancement. We must transcend even the ritual of religion. In this denial we must see only the will of God. His will must become our will, and his perfection must become our perfection. In this state there is no separateness; man and God have truly become one.

As a mystic, Meister Eckhart taught that space and time are not real. In the experience whereby we feel the unity of man and God, spatial and temporal factors are transcended. It is a state of illumination, in which the light of God blends with the light of the soul. In the final state of man a paradox emerges. The self, by being destroyed, experiences a glorious rebirth.

"Not only the Son of the heavenly Father is born in the darkness which is his own, but you, too, are born there, a son of the same heavenly Father, and to you also he gives power. Now see how great the profit is! For all the truth the authorities ever learned by their own intelligence and understanding, or ever shall learn up to

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

the last of days, they never got the least part of the knowledge that is in the core [of the soul]. Let it be called ignorance or want of knowledge, still it has more in it than all wisdom and all knowledge without it, for this outward ignorance lures and draws you away from things you know about and even from yourself. That is what Christ meant when he said: 'Whosoever forsaketh not himself and mother and father and all that is external is not worthy of me.' It was as if he would say: 'Whosoever will not depart from the externality of creatures cannot be born or received in this divine birth.' By robbing yourself of self and all externalities you are admitted to the truth.

"And I really believe it, and am sure that the person who is right in this matter will never be separated from God by any mode [of action] or anything else. I say that there is no way he can fall into deadly sin. He would rather suffer the most shameful death than commit the least of mortal sins, as did the saints. I say that he could not commit even a venial sin nor consent to one in himself or other people, if it could be prevented. He is so strongly attracted and drawn and accustomed to this way of life that he would not turn to another. All his mind and powers are directed to this one end."<sup>9</sup>

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ECKHART

Many philosophers have considered Eckhart the real founder of German philosophy. He used the German language with consummate skill; in fact, he had the vigor which we later find in Martin Luther. In many ways his mysticism helped pave the way for the Reformation. While he was faithful to the Church, he negated its basic tenets. He taught that what matters most is the *individual's approach* to God and that no external mediation is needed.

In the 19th century Eckhart was rediscovered by the Romanticists—especially by Baader, who regarded him as one of the outstanding philosophers of all time. Hegel was inspired by Eckhart's system, as was his great opponent, Schopenhauer. The German Idealists were impressed with his system, since he taught that the scientific realm is secondary to the vision of God and that reason must be subordinated to intuition.

Strangely enough, Eckhart's philosophy was used by the Nazis. For example, according to Alfred Rosenberg, Eckhart anticipated the teachings of Fascism. His theories were also used to substantiate the New Faith movement in Germany, which tried to get away

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

from orthodox Christianity and used such abstractions as the "German soul," "German culture," and "German religion." Still, when we read Eckhart in the original, we find little reason for such identification. Eckhart did not speak as a German; his faith and his philosophy had no boundaries, and he represented religion in its true universality. Essentially nothing mattered to him but God; away from God there is nothingness, he claimed, but with him eternal bliss and glory can be found.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why was Meister Eckhart suspected of heresy?
2. Describe Eckhart's view of poverty. Do you agree with it? Explain.
3. Explain Eckhart's concept of God. Compare it with that of Aquinas.
4. What does Eckhart mean by *disinterest*? How can it be achieved?
5. Explain Eckhart's doctrine, "God is within man."
6. According to Eckhart, what are the obstacles in man's quest for union with God?
7. Why did Eckhart prefer an active life?
8. What are Eckhart's main works?
9. What are the attractive features of Eckhart's philosophy?
10. Why is Eckhart so popular in modern times?
11. Summarize Eckhart's contributions to philosophy.

# OCKHAM AND THE DECLINE OF SCHOLASTICISM

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## DISINTEGRATION OF SCHOLASTICISM

Scholasticism in the 14th century did not achieve the same authority as in the previous century. It was still the favorite method of philosophy; it still dominated the thinkers of the age, but its vitality was gone. The 14th century in many ways was like our own. The same spirit of disintegration, the same physical insecurity, and the same intolerance prevailed. Many thought that the world was coming to an end, just as today the fear of atomic destruction is overwhelming. Still, the 14th century contained the seeds of a new age, and its spirit of disintegration was merely the prelude to a new age of culture. Perhaps the 20th century, despite its wars, revolutions, and chaos, may also be the overture to a new age and a new renaissance.

The decline of Scholasticism was not cataclysmic; rather, it took many decades. Even after Scholasticism disappeared as the ruling method of philosophy, it continued to hold sway in Catholicism, and it has experienced a rebirth in the 20th century through such able thinkers as Gilson and Maritain. The reasons for its decline cannot

be separated from the general changes in culture which occurred in the 14th century. A re-orientation took place, changing the center of man's perspective and bringing about scientific secularism instead of religious supernaturalism.

It appears certain that the vitality of Scholasticism had been exhausted. In Aquinas, Scholasticism had reached its most original expression, but following him, except Duns Scotus, second-rate thinkers predominated. They were commentators who, most of the time, quibbled over unessential details. The language of the Scholastics in the 14th century became extremely obscure, and it is difficult to know what they really meant. Endless disputes took place which had as their foundation such abstract topics as the nature of the angels or the concept of substantial forms.

It is no wonder that the world outside the universities frequently regarded the Scholastics as old-fashioned. Being dominated by tradition, they continued in the ways of the past and neglected the new forces which were rising in Europe, namely capitalism and nationalism.

It must be remembered that Scholasticism rested upon a moral ideal. The acquirement of virtues was regarded as necessary, both in political and in economic affairs. The ruler, as we have seen, was to be a model citizen, and he was to inspire his subjects with respect for religion and with a pious attitude toward the papacy. But the Scholastic ideal was scarcely designed to meet the demands of power politics, which dominated the 14th century.

The decline of Scholasticism coincided with the breakdown of the feudal order. Society was becoming dynamic rather than remaining static. Class barriers became less distinct, and everywhere the desire for profit was evident. The philosophical hierarchy, which Scholasticism pictured, could not be maintained any longer. The intellectual as well as the social universe thus was involved in an unending state of flux in which tradition had no real place.

From a social standpoint it is necessary to notice the shift which substituted the middle class for the old aristocracy. Learning in the Middle Ages had been practically monopolized by the Church, whose main ideal was the supernatural. Now, however, the middle class took over, and it was more interested in law, medicine, and practical subjects than in religion. The spirit of pragmatism thus triumphed in the 14th century. More and more frequently students asked, What is the practical value of the subject? How can it be applied to life?



In the 13th century the universities of Europe had maintained a rather high scholastic standard. It was different in the 14th century, when almost everywhere the course of studies was shortened and some of the strict requirements for degrees were removed. This movement was especially evident in the field of theology. It resulted in superficiality of knowledge and, frequently, in second-rate teaching.

The decline of Scholasticism coincided with diminishing respect for Aristotle. This attitude was not merely due to the rediscovery of other Greek thinkers but also caused by a re-evaluation of Aristotle's theories, which frequently were found to be in disagreement with the basic tenets of Christianity. The attack against Aristotle proceeded on many fronts. In the field of methodology the scientists substituted *experimentation* for deduction. In the field of physical science they omitted the concept of design. In religion, mysticism replaced the rationalism which is part of the Aristotelian theology.

The new philosophy was aided, above all, by the revival of nominalism, which found its strongest representative in Ockham. Although nominalism started as a highly academic movement and was understood only by a few, it created a veritable intellectual revolution.

### DURANDUS

Among the predecessors of Ockham we find Durandus, a Dominican who taught theology at Paris and became, in his later life, a bishop. Although he remained faithful to the spirit of orthodoxy, his views marked a departure from the Scholastic path. Durandus rejected the concept of the active intellect, which he believed unnecessary in explaining the process of knowledge. He asserted that the individual is the only reality and universals do not exist as ontological essences. Regarding general philosophy, he felt that dialectical knowledge alone is not sufficient. In fact, Durandus held that reason and faith are opposed to each other. In this way, he contradicted the fundamental spirit of medieval philosophy.

### AUREOLI

Although Aureoli was a Franciscan, he agreed with Durandus in his fundamental philosophy. He occupied a high position in the Franciscan order and became bishop of Aix in 1321.

Aureoli believed that the universals are not real. Thus, he said, knowledge is concerned with specific facts. He tried to simplify

philosophy by denying the distinction between essence and existence, and he thought it unnecessary to separate the soul and its faculties.

Like Durandus, he found no place in his system for the active intellect. It is interesting to note that Aureoli started out as a Scotist but in his later teachings practically approached the viewpoint of Ockham.

### OCKHAM'S CAREER

Scholasticism was almost given its death blow by Ockham. He was born in Surrey, *c.* 1300, did his undergraduate work at Oxford, and, when still quite young, started to teach there. Very soon Ockham was suspected of heresy and called to appear before the Pope in Avignon. For a time he languished in jail, but this experience did not break his spirit. Extremely audacious, he advocated the viewpoint of the "Spiritual Franciscans" and found a willing supporter in emperor Louis of Bavaria, who protected him. In 1328 Ockham was excommunicated, but he nevertheless kept up his activities against the papacy.

### NOMINALISM

In his philosophy, Ockham began by showing that reality cannot be conceived as being universal; rather, it is individual. The only form of knowledge deals with *specific* facts. Our intellectual processes do not need intermediary species. All real knowledge, he taught, is based on intuition; abstraction, on the other hand, does not give us a true picture of reality. Away, then, with the active intellect! Away with the substantial forms! Thus, we understand the importance of Ockham's "razor," with which he tried to abolish the useless entities of the metaphysicians.

Important in his philosophy is the concept of "signs." He showed that there are three kinds of discourse: written, spoken, and conceived. The last is in the mind only. Knowledge is reduced to a "sign" which stands for the object. We have two types of sciences: one natural, the other artificial. The latter is applied to language and writing.

Ockham made it clear that knowledge must be based on experience, that we do not perceive the object directly but know it only through a sign. This idea introduces epistemological dualism, for his theory of signs constitutes a medium between the subject and the object.

Ockham made a sharp distinction between intuitive and abstract concepts. According to him, intuitive concepts are the more direct and have greater emotional force. Abstract concepts, on the other hand, can be manipulated by the mind and frequently do not correspond with the objects which they are supposed to represent. In short, they are mental labels by which we classify the multitude of particular things.

What then happens to such laws as that of causality, and the eternal ends about which the Scholastics spoke? Are they real? Do they find a counterpart in the realm of nature?

Ockham answered in the negative. They are fictions of the human mind through which it tries to understand the processes of nature, he declared, but they do not have a corresponding reality in the realm of bodies.

Why do we use universal terms? Ockham stated not because they are absolute, or because they refer to a universal reality, for only individuals are real, but because of their practical function. In this way the mind can manipulate the objects which it perceives in the external world.

The magnitude of the intellectual revolution which Ockham instigated can scarcely be exaggerated. Almost with one stroke he eliminated the universals which Scholasticism had inherited from its Platonic background. It was a direct blow against all the abstract forms which the medieval philosophers upheld. Since entities were not to be duplicated, philosophy was to be simplified. *Philosophy's main task now was to explain and to define individuals.* From a social standpoint, this marked the basic democratic tendency of Ockham. He turned the attention of the intellectual world away from universal concepts, and, instead, emphasized the reality and dignity of the individual. No wonder he attacked the papacy so strongly, and no wonder he believed in a more democratic basis of Church government!

In his religious philosophy, Ockham felt that we cannot prove the existence of God; thus we believe in God because of faith, not because philosophy demonstrates his existence. The same is true when it comes to the immortality of the soul. We cannot prove the soul's immortality by using technical arguments; we can only rely upon the dogmas of theology. What happens, then, to our knowledge of God? Can we understand his attributes? Ockham again answered in the negative. Our knowledge of God is only *probable*; we must rely on faith.

## OCKHAM'S ETHICS

In his ethical theory, Ockham insisted upon the subordination of the intellect to the will. This voluntarism had been anticipated by Duns Scotus, but Ockham emphasized it even more strongly than had his distinguished predecessor. Moral goodness, then, does not lie in the intellect, but in the *will*. Evil, likewise, is connected with our emotions rather than with our understanding. To love God is more important than to understand him intellectually.

Ockham's voluntaristic viewpoint led to an arbitrary concept of divine power. For example, he asked why some are predestined for heaven, while others are predestined for hell. He answered that this is to be explained not by the dictates of justice but by the divine will. The same explanation holds true with regard to conversion. Thus, St. Paul was converted on the road to Damascus although he possessed no previous merit of his own, simply because of God's will.

Ockham pointed out that God is not obligated to act in any way. "With him a thing becomes right solely for the reason that he wants it to be so. If God as a total cause were to instigate hatred toward himself in the will of somebody—just as he now causes it as a partial cause—such a person would not be guilty of sin and neither would God, because he is not obligated to anything. In this case the person would not be obligated either, because this act would not be in his control."<sup>1</sup>

## NATURAL SCIENCE IN OCKHAM'S WORKS

Regarding Aristotle, Ockham exhibited an attitude of independence. He showed that frequently the physical views of Aristotle cannot be substantiated. Ockham's concept of motion was strikingly different from that of Aristotle, who appealed to an external cause, for Ockham considered motion to represent a natural capacity of bodies. Furthermore, Ockham believed a plurality of worlds is possible. Here, again, he contradicted Aristotle, who stated that the earth by its very nature moves toward the center of the universe and that any other world would do the same.

"It may be objected as the philosopher does in his work on *Heaven and the world*, that if there were another world, then the earth of that world would either move toward the center of this world or not. It cannot be said that it would not, because bodies of

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Tornay, *Ockham, studies and selections*, p. 180.

the same element move to the same place; therefore, because the earth of this world moves by nature toward the center of this world, the earth of that other world would move by nature toward the center of this world also. If however, the earth of the other world does not move toward the center of this world, then, by its nature, it recedes from the center of this world. But this is impossible, because no heavy body ever moves by nature from the center.

"If to this point it is replied that the individual objects of the same element move by nature to the center yet not identically to the same but each to its own center even though these be numerically diverse, the Philosopher answers that this would be impossible, because, then, the different parts of our earth would move towards various centers, the opposite of which is apparent to our senses."

The answer of Ockham is clear and concise, and indicates his scientific bent:

"All individual objects of the same element could by their nature move toward exactly the same place, in case they occupied successively the same spot lying outside their natural place. Exactly this would happen if the earth of the other world were put where the earth is within this heaven. It would move toward the same place as does the earth of this world. Considering, however, that it is outside of this world and within the heaven of another world, it will just as little move toward the center of this world, as a fire going up at Oxford would move identically toward the same place as if it were at Paris."<sup>2</sup>

### OCKHAM'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

In his political philosophy Ockham protested against the supremacy of the Pope. To say, then, he declared, that the Pope is completely absolute is a mistake; if he were, the Pope would exercise privileges which belong only to God. Furthermore, Ockham made it clear, the papacy is not to interfere in intellectual matters, for complete freedom is to prevail in the discussion of the philosophers. In this view, again, he anticipated much of modern thinking.

Ockham enumerated the various wrongs committed by the Church at Avignon:

"The church of Avignon tries to rule over all Christians tyrannically, inflicting upon the faithful of Christ serious and enormous

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

injustices. To do this more freely and without any fear, she persecutes tyrannically all those who dare to start an argument about her powers, even though they do it with the best of motives. Thus it comes about that in the universal and other studies, no doctor or master dares even to offer or accept a thesis for debate and determination with reference to the power of the Pope. At the same time, such debates about the papal power ought to be pleasing both to the Pope and to his subordinates, and welcomed by them inasmuch as knowledge of the what and how and why with reference to the power of the Pope, is necessary for both parties.

"The church of Avignon does an especial wrong to the Roman Empire by claiming greater temporal right over it than over other kingdoms. This church does not possess such prerogative over the Roman Empire either by divine or human rights. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

This is not all. Ockham believed that the Church was also unjust regarding the individual believer:

"They usurp a power which they do not possess, depriving the faithful, clergy and laity, of their possessions, rights and liberties. They impose upon their shoulders unsupportable burdens. They instigate warfare among the Christians, sedition and discord, and foment them after instigation. They impose wicked sentences and unjust procedures, trapping the simple-minded. They materially impede the progress of science and coerce the more learned and intelligent to submit their intellect to them in captivity, against reason and against the holy scriptures. Innumerable other injustices and excesses could be adduced, whereby they inflict the Christian people, disturb them, seduce them and try to force them into servitude against the liberty of the law of Gospel."<sup>4</sup>

### *THE INFLUENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF OCKHAM*

Ockham may be considered the founder of a new philosophical tradition. Stimulating an interest in scientific experimentation, he added to the opposition to Aristotle. He showed that most of the dogmas of religion cannot be substantiated by reason, and he made it clear that the basic concepts of Scholasticism are useless.

Ockham appeals to us especially because of his modern conclusions. In him we have the germs of voluntarism and pragmatism, as well as logical positivism. The conclusions of his philosophy led

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

to epistemological skepticism. In this way he undermined the certainty of the Middle Ages.

In many ways Ockham reminds us of Kant. In him, as in Kant, there were the same dislike of intellectualism and the same emphasis on *faith*. Both were unorthodox in their religious views, although Ockham had to suffer more severely than Kant. Furthermore, both undermined the foundations of metaphysics and were especially keen in their discussions of the cosmological argument for the existence of God.

In his scientific views Ockham anticipated both Descartes and Newton. In a rudimentary sense, he stated both the law of inertia and the law of gravitation. His concept of the homogeneous nature of the world-stuff was adopted by Nicholas of Cusa, while his championship of *infinity* found a place in the cosmology of Bruno.

The Ockhamist movement greatly stimulated the development of new scientific ideas and formed the vanguard of the anti-Aristotelian movement. Among its representatives we find John Buridan, Nicholas of Oresme, and Albert of Saxony—all of whom contributed to the destruction of the medieval world-view and to the establishment of the astronomical concepts of Galileo and Copernicus.

In his concept of logic Ockham undermined the deductive method of Scholasticism. The Scholastics held that the categories of reason have an *ontological* significance, and they started with universal assumptions and then drew specific conclusions from them. Ockham, however, reversed their method. Every science begins with *individuals*, he indicated, and universals are not real but only *signs and tools* of reason standing for specific things.

Ockham's nominalism produced a new world-view. In logic it led to the *inductive* method; in epistemology it led to the development of *empiricism*; in politics it led to a democratic emphasis; and in social theory it produced the germs of individualism.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe Ockham's concept of nominalism.
2. How did Ockham stimulate the progress of science?
3. What was Ockham's attitude toward Aristotle?
4. Describe Ockham's ethical doctrines.
5. In what ways was Ockham a voluntarist?
6. How did Ockham contribute to the development of skepticism?
7. Why did Ockham object to the theory of papal infallibility?
8. How did Ockham contribute to the development of free thought?
9. In what ways was Ockham a heretic?

# TWILIGHT OF MEDIEVAL THOUGHT

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## DECLINE OF THE CHURCH

**T**he disintegration of Scholasticism was intimately connected with the decline of the Church. In the 14th century the Church was threatened by the national states, which resented the temporal pretensions of the papacy. The local clergy tended to become more independent of Rome and strove to become autonomous, both politically and religiously. The middle class resented the supernatural ideals of the Church and, instead, emphasized a naturalistic philosophy of life. Everywhere forces were stirring which later led to the Reformation and the inauguration of our modern scientific world.

Trouble had broken out at the end of the 13th century between Philip IV and Boniface. Philip had taxed the Cistercian order in France very heavily, and Boniface had answered by a bull, *Clericis laicos*, which maintained that the king had no right to tax the clergy without the permission of the Pope. Philip replied, however, by cutting off the revenue of the papacy. In another bull, *Unam*



*sanctam*, the Pope again expressed his belief in the supremacy of the Church.

"That there is one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church we are impelled by our faith to believe and to hold—this we do firmly believe and openly confess—and outside of this there is neither salvation or remission of sins. . . . Therefore, in this one and only Church, there is one body and one head—not two heads as if it were a monster—namely, Christ and Christ's Vicar, Peter and Peter's successor, for the Lord said to Peter himself, 'Feed my sheep': *my* sheep, he said, using a general term and not designating these or those sheep, so that we must believe that all the sheep were committed to him. If, then, the Greeks, or others, shall say that they were not entrusted to Peter and his successors, they must perforce admit that they are not of Christ's sheep, as the Lord says in John, 'there is one fold, and one shepherd.'

"In this Church and in its power are two swords, to wit, a spiritual and a temporal, and this we are taught by the words of the Gospel, for when the Apostles said, 'Behold, here are two swords' [in the Church, namely, since the Apostles were speaking], the Lord did not reply that it was too many, but enough. And surely he who claims that the temporal sword is not in the power of Peter has but ill understood the word of our Lord when he said, 'Put up thy sword in its scabbard.' Both, therefore, the spiritual and the material swords, are in the power of the Church, the latter indeed to be used for the Church, the former by the Church, the one by the priest, the other by the hand of kings and soldiers, but by the will and sufferance of the priest. It is fitting, moreover, that one sword should be under the other, and the temporal authority subject to the spiritual power. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

But this language did not impress the king, who continued to maintain his independent position.

Between 1309 and 1376 the papacy was completely controlled by France, with the Popes residing at Avignon. Consequently, they lost much of their standing, especially in England and France. Later the Church was torn apart by a schism. There were several Popes, all claiming the high office. This action undermined the faith of Europe and the effectiveness of the papacy. The disunity of the Church lent support to the conciliar movement, which believed in a more democratic Church administration and claimed that authority rests with the individual believer, not with the Pope.

<sup>1</sup> Webster, *Historical selections*, pp. 463-464.

*MARSIGLIO OF PADUA*

The most famous defense of the conciliar theory was probably contained in the work of Marsiglio of Padua, who, like Ockham, was under the protection of Louis of Bavaria. His work was publicly condemned at Rome, but it had an important influence on the development of modern political theory. What was Marsiglio's aim? He wanted to destroy the system of papal control. He believed that spiritual authority is not supreme but subordinate to the secular rulers.

Aristotelianism was quite evident in his viewpoint. He regarded the state as a natural institution and upheld the importance of reason. The Churchmen, Marsiglio asserted, do not have a special function and their task is no more significant than the task of any other class; rather, they are subordinate to the prince, who is supreme. Incidentally, he declared, those who violate religious ordinances are not to be punished by the Church, which can only instruct but has no actual political power.

What happens, then, to the doctrine of papal infallibility? Marsiglio denied it categorically. Real authority, he held, belongs to the Church body as a whole.

In his theory of government, Marsiglio of Padua made the legislative branch supreme. This theory implies that the laws are to be followed in a strict way and that ultimately the people are sovereign.

*WYCLIFFE AND SOCIAL REVOLT*

John Wycliffe combined religious and philosophic interests in his career. He received his doctorate in theology at Oxford, where he enjoyed large audiences. In his technical philosophy he was a Platonist but, in general, he was more significant for his social views than for his metaphysical concepts.

He was especially radical in his doctrine regarding property. In Paradise, he averred, man needs no property, and, strictly speaking, property is the result of sin. He urged the Church to get rid of its temporal possessions and, in this way, return to the way of life advocated by Jesus Christ. The papacy immediately became suspicious of these doctrines. It appeared that Wycliffe would die a martyr's death, but he was protected by the secular authorities in England, and the university of Oxford insisted there be no interference with his freedom of speech.

In Wycliffe's philosophy we find radical social views. Thus, he established an order of priests called Lollards, whose task it was to administer to the poor. They became popular in England and tried to improve the spiritual life of the Church.

There is no reason to suppose that there was an active connection between Wycliffe and the leaders of the Peasants' Rebellion, but these leaders were undoubtedly inspired by his work. The peasants were led by John Ball, who had been a priest. Froissart, who was violently opposed to Ball, vividly described his beliefs and activities:

"A crazy priest in the county of Kent, called John Ball, who, for his absurd preaching had been thrice confined in the prison of the archbishop of Canterbury, was greatly instrumental in inflaming them with those ideas. He was accustomed, every Sunday after mass, as the people were coming out of the church, to preach to them in the market-place, and assemble a crowd around him; to whom he would say: 'My good friends, things can not go on well in England, nor ever will, until everything shall be in common; when there shall neither be vassal nor lord, and all distinctions levelled; when the lords shall be no more masters than ourselves. How ill have they used us! And for what reason do they thus hold us in bondage? Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve? and what can they show, or what reasons give, why they should be more the masters than ourselves? except, perhaps, in making us labor and work, for them to spend. They are clothed in velvets and rich stuffs, ornamented with ermine and other furs, while we are forced to wear poor cloth. They have wines, spices, and fine bread, when we have only rye, and the refuse of the straw; and, if we drink, it must be water. They have handsome seats and manors, when we must brave the wind and rain in our labors in the field; but it is from our labor [that] they have wherewith to support their pomp.'"<sup>2</sup>

Thus it can be seen that the reaction against the Church came not only from the upper classes but also from the common people. The 14th century was an age of social revolution intensified by constant dynastic wars.

The views of Wycliffe not only spread among the lower classes but influenced John Huss (1369-1415), who combined religious radicalism with political patriotism. His following in Bohemia was widespread, and the Church leaders realized that he threatened

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 541.

their supremacy. At the council of Constance his views were examined, and he was condemned as a heretic and sentenced to be burned, although he had been given a promise of safe-conduct. This sentence did not discourage his followers, however, and in the 16th century it produced a full revolt led by Luther and Calvin.

### NICHOLAS OF AUTRECOURT

The disintegration of the Church was not only evident in social matters; it was just as pronounced in philosophy. Among those who produced a new ideal in philosophy, we find Nicholas of Autrecourt. In his philosophy he appealed to the atomic theory and showed how the qualitative aspects of nature can be reduced to their quantitative constituents. He was certain that growth and decay are due to the action of atoms.

He felt that God's existence cannot be established by reason. He still believed in God; but this belief was based on faith, not on rational grounds.

Nicholas of Autrecourt is perhaps most famous for his *denial of causality*. In nature we experience certain events, and we jump to the conclusion that they are united by the ties of logical necessity. This, however, according to Nicholas, is a fallacious procedure. *We can only know the existence of the self, which is based on intuition.* Our certainty does not reach to anything else.

Nicholas condemned Aristotle in a severe way, for he believed Aristotle had undermined philosophy by a series of useless abstractions. Like Ockham, Nicholas of Autrecourt insisted that entities are not to be duplicated in philosophy and that we must be faithful to the empirical method.

### JOHN OF MIRECOURT

The viewpoint of Nicholas was repeated by John of Mirecourt, who likewise started with the concept of the self and did not accept the conventional proofs of the existence of God. Like Nicholas, he said that there is no logical necessity in nature and that we cannot explain the concept of substance. For example, we perceive various impressions of phenomena. This perception, however, is no valid foundation for understanding the essence of phenomena.

In short, John of Mirecourt held the powers of the mind to be limited. We can have certainty when we turn to the self, he claimed, but when we reason about the external world, substances and essences, *probability* must be our guide.

## BURIDAN

In passing, we must mention Buridan, who was interested in both philosophy and science and whose astronomical speculations indicate a divergence from orthodox Scholasticism and Aristotelianism. He believed in nominalism and thus rejected the Scholastic view of universals. Freedom of the will, he insisted, lies in the *suspension* of judgment, through which we carefully consider various alternatives and through which we finally arrive at a satisfactory decision. He meant that the will can be guided by the intellect.

His opponents probably countered with the story of the ass which starved to death while it stood, undecided, between two bales of hay. Buridan, however, would scarcely have agreed that such hesitation is possible, for he thought man's reason *inevitably* would make a satisfactory choice and, in the power of rational deliberation, true freedom could be found.

## BRADWARDINE

More deterministic than Buridan was Thomas Bradwardine, who taught at Oxford and, in 1349, became archbishop of Canterbury. He stressed the arbitrary will of God, which he regarded as the basic cause of all activity, including human desires and human actions. It may be asked then, Is God the source of evil and sin? Aquinas had denied this doctrine, but logical consistency led the archbishop to declare that God is the author of sin—a doctrine which scandalized many orthodox professors.

What then is the function of man? How should he act in relationship to God? In his answer to this question Bradwardine was still quite conventional: Man should subordinate his will to the divine majesty, and he should attempt to emancipate himself from sinful pleasures and from all external things. In fact, man should disregard even the dictates of reason; only God should be his guide.

DISINTEGRATION OF SCHOLASTIC  
CERTAINTY

Throughout the 14th century Averrhoism contributed to the disintegration of the Scholastic movement. It found its outstanding representative in John of Jandun, who, in the main, repeated the arguments of Siger of Brabant. Believing that matter is eternal and rejecting personal immortality, he made much of the deathlessness of the active intellect. In him, also, we find the doctrine of the

double truth. In natural philosophy he was guided by Averrhoes, but in theology he subordinated himself to the Christian religion. Thus he saved himself from too much censorship by the orthodox theologians.

Averrhoism was especially powerful in Italy, at the university of Padua, which later contributed much to the secular philosophy of the Renaissance. At Bologna, Averrhoistic philosophy led to a greater interest in science, particularly in the field of medicine. The scientists of both Padua and Bologna were noted throughout the 14th century for their agnosticism and opposition to the Church.

To conclude, we find that the unity of the Church was not only disrupted by the struggle between the kings and the papacy and by the growing conciliar movement but also shaken by new philosophical theories which could not be combined with the Scholastic ideal of knowledge. Divergent philosophical movements combined to bring about a new world-view. On the one hand, mystics like Eckhart showed that the intercession of the Church is unnecessary and that salvation must be based on an immediate contact between man and God. On the other hand, nominalistic philosophers attacked the concept of causality, and they showed the weaknesses of the Scholastic and Aristotelian theories. Their motto was: Back to nature and experimentation.

### *THE NEW SPIRIT TAKES OVER*

After the 14th century the method of philosophy completely changed. Instead of to theology, the queen of the sciences, scholars now turned to nature and used mathematical principles by which they described the order of the universe. The localism of the Middle Ages was shaken almost everywhere, first, by new geographic discoveries; second, by the vast imperialistic expansion of the various states; and third, by the introduction of capitalistic economy, which supplanted the feudal system.

It was an expansion not only in geographic, political, and economic matters but also in scientific theory. The world-view of the Middle Ages was shown to be utterly fallacious and inadequate. The method of allegory, of blind belief in miracles, was undermined. In its stead, the scientists and the philosophers now appealed to tentative hypotheses and tentative theories. The new age was far more adventurous, intellectually, than the Middle Ages. It was more bold in its hypotheses, more penetrating in its scientific researches, and more functional and practical in its use of inventions.

Ever since the Middle Ages, modern man has been guided by a naturalistic view of life. He is confronted by a variety of churches and a multitude of philosophies instead of one church and one ideal of philosophy.

As yet we have found no substitute for the intellectual unity which characterized the Middle Ages. Although we are emancipated from supernaturalism, we tend to be just as fanatical as our medieval ancestors, our fanaticism extending to *social and economic philosophies*. Thus modern man is suspended between a past which he cannot recover and a future which he cannot comprehend.

### QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe the views of Marsiglio of Padua.
2. Why did the peasants revolt against the Church?
3. How did Wycliffe influence the opposition to the papacy?
4. Why was Huss burnt at the council of Constance?
5. What was the significance of the conciliar movement?
6. What was Autrecourt's philosophy?
7. What was Bradwardine's view of determinism?
8. Describe the philosophy of Buridan.
9. What forces caused the collapse of the medieval world-view?
10. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the medieval spirit?
11. Should modern man accept the certainty of medieval philosophy? Explain.





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